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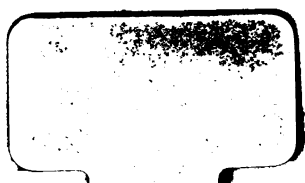
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GEORGE DONNINGTON.



GEORGE DONNINGTON

OR

IN THE BEAR'S GRIP.

BY

CHARLES H. EDEN,

AUTHOR OF "AUSTRALIA'S HEROES," "FROZEN ASIA," ETC., ETC.

Now, afore Heaven, 'tis shame such wrongs are borne."—*Richard II.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ERRATUM.

Page 171, line 2, for *belle* read *bel*.

Le soldat et l'homme de police disposent à leur gré de la vie, de l'honneur, et de la fortune des citoyens, bien mieux, la simple affirmation d'un portier ivre, las de sa longue faction nocturne et désireux de se dégourdir les jambes en menant quelqu'un au bureau de police, suffit pour faire envoyer en prison, et de là peut-être en Sibérie s'ils n'ont pas d'amis en haut lieu, les gens qui passent le long de la maison dont il a la garde.

* * * * *

Comme on doit le penser, les passions les moins avouables, les plus basses, les plus odieuses, ont déjà commencé d'utiliser à leur profit le régime de terreur qui pèse sur la Russie. Tout être lâche et vil ayant des rancunes à satisfaire, de l'argent à extorquer, un intérêt quelconque à faire disparaître quelqu'un, se fait mouchard volontaire et dénonce. Croyez-vous, par hasard, que les gens arrêtés ces jours-ci à Saint-Petersbourg et ailleurs étaient tous des nihilistes ? Allons donc ! Il y avait parmi eux des parents dont on convoitait l'héritage, des femmes qui n'avaient pas voulu céder à quelque misérable, des hommes qui, dans un accès de franchise, avaient souffleté de leur mépris quelque calomniateur gonflé de fiel. Ces natures basses et venimeuses se sont vengées. . . .

Henri Bellenger.

"The Third Section and the governors of provinces look on the new courts as mere nuisances, and act accordingly. Finally, a great many cases are disposed of by the Executive *à huis clos*—away from judges and juries alike."—*Nineteenth Century*, January, 1883, p. 29.

GEORGE DONNINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

WARHAM MANOR.

NEAR the bedroom window, adjusting his necktie, and whistling unconsciously the while, stood a lad of nineteen, upon whose face a pleased smile arose as the sun broke out from behind a somewhat threatening bank of clouds, whilst at the same moment a short thickset individual, clad in velveteen much the worse for use, and the invariable leather leggings that form part and parcel of every true gamekeeper's equipment, emerged from behind a thicket of laurels and stood for an instant looking skywards. The lad immediately threw open his window and hailed the man in a voice that betrayed considerable excitement.

“Good morning, Aldham. What is the weather going to be like? Will the birds lie?”

These questions were uttered rapidly; the speaker's tone indicating that a favourable answer must as a matter of course be returned to each; but the game-keeper was not given to loquacity, and very chary of definitely committing himself on any subject—perhaps also he enjoyed holding his young master in suspense; therefore he continued his survey of the heavens for some seconds before touching his hat in reply.

“Can't tell yet, Muster George, whether it be going to rain or no; but likely the birds will lie if it holds up.”

“I could have told you that,” returned the lad, pettishly, on receiving this oracular forecast. “You always like to paint things in their worst colours, Aldham.”

But here a window immediately beneath that at which the young man stood was violently thrown open, and a petulant voice, at the sound of which the keeper judiciously vanished, exclaimed,

“If you wish to give Aldham any further orders, George, be good enough to do so in the servants' hall or the stables. To hear you one would think you were hailing the maintop of a line-of-battle ship. Because it

is the first of September you think the whole house is to — ” but the remainder of this gracious speech was lost by the abrupt closing of the speaker's window.

“The governor in one of his tantrums again,” muttered the lad, composedly, whilst resuming his interrupted toilette. “Dear old fellow, what can have changed him so of late? he never used to be like this.”

But the sound of a gong ringing through the house announced that breakfast was on the table, and thrusting himself into his shooting-coat George hurried down stairs and burst into the dining-room. Here he found two persons: a beautiful little maiden of some fifteen summers and a neatly-dressed middle-aged lady, who united the functions of a governess to those of a comptroller of the household, for Warham Manor had lost its natural mistress some ten years before.

The girl ran at once to her brother, and flinging her arms round his neck cried, “Oh, George, I am so delighted that the day is fine. I could hardly sleep all night for thinking of it.”

“Which perhaps accounts for the trouble we had in getting you up this morning,” said Miss Ridley, smilingly, as she nodded a welcome to George, who was still locked in his sister's embrace.

“Very kind of you, I'm sure,” replied George. “Can't

say that the prospect before me interfered with *my* slumbers. But what is the matter with the governor? he assailed me from his bedroom-window for speaking to old Aldham."

"For shouting at Aldham you mean, George," said Miss Ridley. "We could hear him at the back of the house, could we not, Eva?" But the girl was not to be lured into any confession that would appear in the smallest degree to incriminate her beloved brother.

"Well, if I did shout there was no one to disturb at that hour," returned the lad, carelessly. "But do you know, Miss Ridley, that I am becoming rather anxious about the gov.—my father, I mean. He has quite altered lately; the least thing seems to vex him and put him into an ill-temper wholly disproportionate to the cause of offence. I confess that I don't like to see it. Have neither of you observed it?" he continued, turning his eyes from Miss Ridley to his sister.

"I have," said the latter, without hesitation. "Only the day before yesterday papa blew up poor old Latimer for giving me some plants out of the conservatory, and last night ——"

"Be silent, Eva," broke in the governess; "you have no right to criticise your papa. And your language, also, is most unbecoming. Who taught you such a

vulgar expression as 'blow up,' I should like to know?"

"I heard papa say only yesterday that he would blow up Dawson," replied the girl, demurely, "and did not know that it was slang."

This answer rather turned the tables upon Miss Ridley; but she was saved from further embarrassment by the entry of the person in question. With a slight bow to the governess, and a careless nod in acknowledgment of the greeting with which his children welcomed him, Sir Ralph took his chair, helped himself to an egg, the shell of which he cracked in an absent manner, and then took refuge in *The Times*, which, duly cut and ironed, had been laid beside his plate. An unwonted silence prevailed, produced by the presence of the person of whom all had last spoken, but George soon broke the spell.

"Do you intend handling a gun to-day, father?" he asked.

"Handling a gun!" repeated the older man, vacantly, and drumming aimlessly on the table as he seemed to collect his faculties to answer the simple question. "Handling a gun! Oh, yes; to-day is sacred to St. Partridge. No, George, I shall leave them to you, and hope that you will find the birds

plentiful. Aldham told me they were very strong on the wing this year."

The tone in which the words were uttered was sad and broken, as though some heavy trouble weighed upon the speaker, but a ring of genuine affection ran through them, a circumstance so unusual of late that the young man rose, and, passing over, laid his hand gently on the baronet's shoulder. "Why not come out, father?" he said, coaxingly; "old Aldham will be delighted to see you amongst the turnips again. It won't look like a real first of September without you."

"Make the most of it, my boy; for who knows where we shall be this time next year?"

"This time next year?" broke in Eva. "Why, we shall be here, of course; and the year after that I shall have grown up and be out. No more lessons then. Heigh-oh, I wish some good fairy would put the clock on."

But her father heard neither her, nor the rebuke that this wicked wish called forth from Miss Ridley, to whose well-balanced mind it seemed inconceivable that any girl should wish the happy period of exercises, scales, and backboard abridged; his egg remained untasted, and his eyes were fixed vacantly on the

window, whilst his fingers kept up the same nervous drumming on the cloth.

"You are eating nothing, Sir Ralph," said Miss Ridley, "and your coffee is quite cold. Let me give you another cup."

"No, thank you," he replied, listlessly; but immediately recovering his animation he continued, "Is not that young Dick Aldham with the letter-bag? Look, George; Eva, you have good eyes—there, just in the bend beyond the bridge."

"Yes, papa, there he is sure enough; and, George, that little terrier-pup whose tail he bit off last week is following him. I am sure I would never follow any one cruel enough to treat me in that way! I mean, of course, if I was a dog," she continued, with a ludicrous attempt at dignity, as she marked the smile on her brother's face. "Shall I run and hurry him, papa?" and before any one could answer she had thrown open the French window and darted forth hatless, her long locks floating back over her shapely shoulders and gleaming in the autumn sun like an aureole of living gold; a sight, indeed, to delight the heart of any father, but only intense anxiety and impatience were visible in the baronet's face as he watched the lithe young form draw near the tardy

mail-man, tear his burden from him, and return at racing-speed, throwing the bag recklessly before her as, with a little shout of triumph, she burst into the room.

With hands that trembled from eagerness Sir Ralph unlocked the leather bag and pulled forth its contents. Two for Miss Ridley, one for Eva, and nearly a dozen for the master of the house.

"Well, I may as well be off," said George, seeing his companions all engrossed with their missives. "What, another letter from Laura Barnard, Evy? I thought she had given you up since her engagement."

"Not a bit!" cried the girl, joyously, as she mastered the contents. "Laura is to be married in two months, and she has asked me to be one of the bridesmaids. Oh, how jolly! and, Miss Ridley, there will be six of us and we are to be dressed all alike in—— but what is the matter with papa?"——a groan, almost a shriek, awful to hear from the world of mental agony it revealed, called the attention of all three to the baronet, who, an open letter in his hand, first swayed helplessly to and fro, and then, before any one could advance to his assistance, fell heavily to the ground.

* * * * *

Two months have passed away and still we are at

Warham Manor, but a sad change has come over the quiet old country-seat since that September morning when George was going forth to slaughter the partridges. Seven weeks have elapsed since Sir Ralph was laid in the family-vault, and now three persons, dressed in deep mourning, are sitting before dinner in the small but comfortable schoolroom, for the larger apartments in their desolation seemed gloomy and dispiriting to both brother and sister and to Miss Ridley. Sorrow and care were plainly written on the faces of the two younger of the party, and the words that were from time to time exchanged showed that they were awaiting the arrival of some one, until which event nothing could be considered as settled.

"At what time did Mr. Bonham say he would reach Hillsdene?" asked Miss Ridley, looking at her watch. "It is past seven now."

"He was to leave Paddington at 4.35, and ought to be at Hillsdene by 6.30. A fly would take a little more than half-an-hour from there. Hush! don't you hear wheels?"

"I hope he will not take umbrage at our treating him entirely without ceremony, and not receiving him in the large apartments," remarked Miss Ridley, as she rose and shook out the heavy folds of her black silk

dress, for the approach of a vehicle was now plainly audible. A rigid sense of propriety ruled this lady's every action ; and she would sooner have tampered with half the commandments in the decalogue than have been convicted of the smallest breach of the *convenances*.

"No danger of that," returned George, petulantly. "Mr. Bonham, by his own order, has closed the rooms, and it would be absurd to re-open them on his account. But I must go down to meet him."

The new arrival was not wholly unknown to any of the party, for he had several times previously visited Warham Manor ; had indeed been present at Sir Ralph's funeral, and at the reading of the will, to which he was appointed sole executor, as well as guardian to the children. But on the latter melancholy occasion his stay had been short, and, respecting the natural grief of the orphans, he had said little or nothing to them except a few words of encouragement and advice. "I shall run down again," he had told George on leaving, "as soon as I have put your poor father's affairs in order ; meanwhile, you and your sister had better remain on here quietly with Miss Ridley."

From time to time the latter lady had heard from him, and it must be confessed that his curt communications had proved highly unpalatable to the little party

at the Manor. First came a note directing Miss Ridley to send him a list of every servant on the premises, and the amount of wages due to each. Then there arrived an individual with a broad red face, checkered necktie, and very tight trousers, around whom hovered an odour of the stable that neither Rimmel nor Piesse and Lubin could have hoped to vanquish, and, on seeing Miss Ridley, presented her with a letter from Mr. Bonham, which briefly said that the bearer was to be allowed to remove the horses and carriages, and that the coachman and stablemen were to be discharged. This had annoyed George beyond measure, and he had written in some anger to his guardian asking if such a step was absolutely necessary ; but Mr. Bonham, in a few words, replied that the young man would see by-and-by that no other course remained open. Shortly after this another letter had reached Miss Ridley bidding her discharge all the servants except four, whom he named, and inclosing a cheque for each, with an additional month's wages instead of due warning. He also gave directions that a considerable portion of the house should be shut up, and counselled his wards to make use of as few rooms as possible.

All the above instructions, though rigidly carried out, had not been executed without many feelings of

wounded pride. The loss of their ponies seemed bad enough to the young people, but when it came to the parting between them and the servants, most of whom had known them in their cradles, the cup of their bitterness seemed filled to overflowing. Even the rough sympathy which the men could not disguise wounded in place of soothing; and when old Aldham, taking leave of his young master, said, "Good-bye, Muster George—Sir George, I mean," he added, hastily correcting himself; "good-bye, sir, we shall never ferret them there rabbits down to long spinney no more;" when the old retainer, with moistened eyes, said this, the poor lad could find no words to reply, but wrung the keeper's horny hand, and hurried from the scene completely unmanned.

Many had been the guesses made by all of them as to how matters would turn out, numberless the speculations as to the tenor of that eventful letter that they had reason to believe hurried, if it did not cause, Sir Ralph's death. That their father must have left his affairs in a very unsettled state—to say no worse—the stringent reductions made in the mode of living at Warham sufficiently testified, but for all certain knowledge they were compelled to await the arrival of their guardian, and—he was here.

Mr. Bonham, by the proceedings above described, had raised a certain feeling of antagonism in the breasts of both Eva and Miss Ridley, the latter thinking his communications unnecessarily curt and abrupt, whilst the girl fretted over the loss of her pony and the low little basket-carriage that she had been presented with by her father on her fifteenth birthday. Neither did that gentleman's manner during dinner tend to remove the constraint that his presence imposed, but this was apparently unnoticed by the guest, who applied himself to his food with much assiduity and equanimity, such conversation as he ventilated turning chiefly on the mismanagement of railway officials and the enormities committed unchecked by their directors.

"Such a thing as a train being in time," he grumbled, after despatching the wing and breast of a pheasant, "is unheard of. Unpunctuality and the accompanying accidents make travelling a perfect misery. And the fault lies entirely with the directors, who think of nothing but good dividends. It is scandalous."

Had any one told the listeners that Mr. Bonham felt nervous in their presence, and that his growlings and general bearishness proceeded from intense sympathy with their altered condition, such a person would have

been assuredly disbelieved, and yet such was the case. He was a very undemonstrative man, and for this reason a man with few friends—so few, indeed, that, without difficulty, he could number them on the fingers of one hand. But, then, with him “friend” bore a deeper meaning than it does with most of us. It was a term not lightly to be bestowed, but the title once acknowledged he would regard no sacrifice of self as too great to testify the estimation in which he held the bond. Possessed of deep passions, held under such stern control that few suspected their existence, Andrew Bonham was a man upon whom the love of woman would have exercised a powerful influence for good or evil. Such love he had once thought his, but it was not to be. It was in the very room where he was now sitting at dinner that he first met Emily Donnington. When, an undergraduate at Oxford, he had come down with his college-chum, Ralph, to shoot the Warham coverts, Emily, then in her seventeenth year, and on the point of emancipation from the school-room, fairly charmed away the heart of her brother’s friend, with whom, by that brother’s connivance, she was thrown into close contact. The girl was wholly ignorant of the conquest she had made, but when before his departure Andrew avowed his love the scales fell from her eyes,

and she saw the mischief she had wrought. With a concentrated earnestness begotten of his deep passion, Andrew pressed his suit, asking only for hope—one ray of hope, on which he might live until he had shown himself worthy of her. It was in vain. Gently but resolutely the young beauty declined him, and held out no particle of encouragement for the future.

“Let us at least part friends,” the girl had said; but Andrew had made no response, nor had seemed to see the proffered hand. Friendship was too cold a substitute for the affection he had lavished on one who had shown herself no better than a practised coquette; he left the Manor suddenly that night, and had never since set eyes upon the woman to whom he attributed the wreck of his future domestic happiness.

On finding out what had occurred, Ralph became furious with his sister, more particularly when she showed a marked pleasure in the attentions of Sir Edward Randal, a young man of great personal attractions, and highly endowed with the good things of this life, but one who Ralph knew to be worldly, selfish, mean, and utterly incapable of rendering his sister's life other than miserable. In vain he entreated her to think of the jewel she was casting away in rejecting Andrew Bonham, and pointed out the difference between

the characters of the two men. The girl was obstinate, self-willed, and determined, besides being really captivated by Randal's manners, and perhaps a little influenced by his wealth and position in the county, so a serious quarrel arose between brother and sister, a breach which remained unhealed until the day of the former's death. For three years Andrew Bonham and Ralph Donnington had wandered over Europe together, every day strengthening the brotherly affection that existed between them. Only on one occasion was reference made to Emily, for the men understood each other without speech. They were seated on a bench on the boulevard of Montbenon at Lausanne, smoking and admiring the glassy surface of the great lake beneath their feet. Andrew had *Galignani* in his hand, and a sudden exclamation made by him called Ralph's attention, who saw with surprise that his companion was ashy pale.

"Look at this," said Andrew, handing his companion the paper. "I will rejoin you presently."

He strolled slowly away, and Ralph, turning to the indicated paragraph, saw the announcement of his sister's marriage with Sir Edward Randal, followed by a brief account of the wedding festivities.

When the friends again met, after the lapse of twenty

minutes, they exchanged a mute hand-grasp ; only four words were spoken by Andrew, who said, solemnly, " May she be happy ! "

Andrew's father was a City merchant of high standing, the head of a large house in Leadenhall Street, with connections extending over a great portion of the globe, but whose chief interests lay in the Russian trade. On his return to England the young man set zealously to work, and thrust himself heart and soul into the business, to the intense astonishment and delight of his father, for hitherto Andrew had manifested a decided distaste to commercial pursuits. Perhaps in Russian grain and flax he hoped to find a " kind nepenthe," and forget the face that even now haunted him in his dreams. Who shall say ? At all events he became known throughout the City as a most able man ; and since his father's death, when the whole management of the concern devolved upon him, he had greatly extended the operations of the house, and rendered the name of Andrew Bonham one of European repute. Immersed in large transactions, he had seldom time to spare for visits, but whenever the occasion presented itself he ran down to Warham and saw his old friend. Now he found a new burden laid upon him by the sudden death of Sir Ralph, but he loyally

accepted it, and had worked unwearyingly in clearing away the difficulties that beset his path as guardian to the two children, whom he soon discovered were wholly unprovided for.

Miss Ridley and Eva had withdrawn ; the wine and dessert were on the table, and the guardian and ward were alone ; the time had arrived to speak out and disburthen himself of the bad news that for weeks had laid heavily on his mind. The constraint manifested by the governess and her charge, together with the studied courtesy of George's replies, had not been lost on him ; indeed, had hurt him more deeply than he cared to confess. He was there as a friend, in the accomplishment of a highly-painful task, and he had looked for some slight recognition of this fact. None such had been forthcoming, and its absence aggravated the difficulties of the announcement he had to make. Hitherto his dealings had been with grown-up business men, hardened by a life of commercial enterprise and accustomed to its vicissitudes. Now he had to tell the son of his oldest friend that he was penniless, that even the roof which sheltered him must be abandoned, and that both he and his sister must go forth into the world or eat the bread of charity. It was painful—more than painful, it was bitter, and his heart bled

for these two young people, but his duty must be done and now the time to do it.

“George,” he began, gravely, “I have many things to tell you of; and God knows that, as your poor father’s oldest friend, I wish that my communications were other than they must be. You are almost a man now, therefore you must call up a man’s courage to face the future before you. My sad tale will not take long, for alas! the circumstances are such that two words will convey them better than a volume. I have disentangled your father’s affairs as far as possible, and I find no words to express the result but ‘total ruin ——’ Here he paused and steadily observed his companion; but though the young man’s face visibly blanched, and his hand nervously grasped the handle of the knife before him, he met the speaker’s gaze unflinchingly and proudly.

“There is the right stuff in the lad,” thought the old merchant; but he continued, “Yes, George, *total ruin*. Your poor father was led by designing men”—he did not add “against my advice and entreaties—into a series of rash speculations, each one of which has turned out more disastrous than the last. Silver-mines in North America, imaginary coal-deposits in New Guinea, diamond-pans in South Africa,—all have

assisted in swallowing up the estate; but the final blow was given by the failure of a great northern bank, in which my poor friend held shares. This last conduced to his death, for he saw in it *total ruin*."

Another pause of some duration now took place, the older man watching the younger, the latter slowly recovering colour though his features were set rigidly. "It is, believe me, hard news to tell, George, and still harder to bear," continued Andrew Bonham, "and you have borne it most gallantly. You now know the worst, and I will leave it to you to break it to your sister and Miss Ridley. I have not left your future out of consideration, but shall enter into no details to-night. When the first stunning effect of this intelligence has passed away you will see whether you think my proposals worthy of consideration. Now, if you will let me know my room, I will go to bed.

After breakfast on the following morning George joined Mr. Bonham, who was smoking a cigar as he paced up and down the broad terrace.

"I need not ask whether you have broken the bad news to your sister," remarked the latter. "That was evident to me at breakfast; but, George, I must congratulate you on the noble way in which you both bear a blow that would prostrate many a stouter man."

"It certainly is not pleasant to be a penniless baronet," said the young man, trying to force a smile, "but that is a matter easily mended. Both Eva and I are anxious to know as soon as possible what plans you have thought of for our future. She is a child and unable to do much, but I am young and strong, sir, and no amount of work would frighten me."

From the moment that Andrew had learned the circumstances of his wards he had racked his brains as to what could be done with and for them. He had thought of pretending that the estate produced surplus sufficient to send the lad to Oxford and complete the girl's education, but the very fondness with which he cherished the memory of his lost friend made him shrink from this innocent deception. He knew how bitterly the pride of the dead man would have suffered had he thought that his children would be reduced to eat the bread of charity, and he durst not offend that feeling, although its possessor had passed away to that realm wherein pride and its kindred passions have no being.

A plan by which they would be comfortably and handsomely provided for had indeed offered itself, but it presented many objections to Andrew. On her brother's death Lady Randal had written to him,

questioning him concerning the orphans, and begging that Morecambe Park might be their home until affairs were arranged. In reply—how the letter and its handwriting had moved him!—Andrew had been compelled to acknowledge that they were utterly destitute; whereupon, after the lapse of several days—which the old merchant shrewdly suspected had been occupied in inducing Sir Edward to take a favourable view of the proposal—came another letter offering to receive both the young people, and expressing their aunt's willingness to defray George's expenses at the University.

"You will, I am sure, dear Mr. Bonham, recognise the great advantages that my nephew and niece will derive from following this scheme, to which Sir Edward is perfectly agreeable. It is true that I have never seen them, and that my poor brother and I continued on ill terms up to the time of his unhappy death; but, if the fault of this estrangement lay with me, by so much more do I owe them reparation. Let them therefore come to us—this I beg of you, *by the memory of the past.*"

This letter, and more particularly its concluding words, had awakened sad memories indeed in the merchant's breast, and had given rise to fresh doubts regarding his duty to his dead friend. That Sir Ralph

would have scouted the idea of his children living beneath the same roof with Sir Edward Randal he well knew, but still her aunt was the most natural protector for the girl at least. What should he do? Much depended on the young people themselves. If they showed total inaptitude to help themselves, by far their best course would be to embrace Lady Randal's offer, although he well knew that even then their lot would be an unhappy one, for many stories were rife in the clubs of Sir Edward's violent temper, and more than one whisper had gone abroad that the conjugal relations between the baronet and his wife were far from pleasant. In truth Andrew Bonham was puzzled exceedingly. His own idea was to offer George a desk in his office, and, having tested the young man's ability, to push him quietly forward until he could become a partner. But would the lad embrace a mercantile career, handicapped moreover as he was by the unlucky prefix to his name? The girl was more easily disposed of. Her education was still unfinished, and it so happened that Andrew was a governor of one of the best schools in Yorkshire, where she would receive every care and advantage at a very small cost. This, his own project, was in the merchant's opinion much the best. If the lad took kindly to the work he would in a few years

be independent, and moreover feel the satisfaction that he had become so by his own exertions. Had he backbone enough in his character to carry him through the subordinate stages? There lay the gist of the question, and, finally, weary of turning the matter over and over in his own mind, Andrew resolved to lay both proposals before George, and to leave the decision entirely with the young people.

Therefore, on that November morning, with the sun vainly trying to pierce the mist and throw a little light and warmth upon the bare trees and leaf-littered walks, Andrew fairly and justly made known both plans, but kept entire silence regarding his intentions of furthering George's career, and, in his anxiety to show perfect neutrality, perhaps unduly enlarging on the advantages of Lady Randal's offer.

"Take a week to consider it," he concluded. "Consult both your sister and Miss Ridley, for she is a sensible woman. Do not make up your mind in a hurry, and jump at a determination that you may hereafter regret."

The lad, who had listened with bowed head and in total silence to his guardian's words, now raised his face, and Andrew saw imprinted on every feature a look of determination not unmingled with pride, as in a

firm voice he replied, "Neither time nor consultation are needed, Mr. Bonham, for Eva and I have resolved to fight our own way in the world, as our poor father would have wished his children to do. We are most grateful to you, and are ready to leave Warham, if necessary, to-morrow."

"Bravely resolved!" cried Andrew, driven out of his habitual reserve by the handsome young face that met his gaze so steadily. "Stick to this, my boy, and Warham shall yet be yours again."

In early life the late baronet had been known as Ralph Donnington, but a distant relation had left him a considerable sum of money conditional on his bearing the surname of Percival after his own. This circumstance was now of use to the orphans; and ten days after the above conversation George Donnington—he had steadily refused to bear his title—became the occupant of a small desk and high stool in Leadenhall Street; while Eva was safely installed in Throstle House, near Wakefield, under the care of the Misses Quilter, very dragons of propriety, outrivalling in this respect Miss Ridley herself. The latter lady returned to her friends, and will reappear no more in these pages.

CHAPTER II.

GREAT ORMOND STREET.

DIFFERENT, indeed, was George's present life from that which he had hitherto been accustomed to lead. Brought up wholly in the country, and knowing nothing of London or its ways, he was at first sorely bewildered. It was expected that he should be in his place by nine every morning, and to accomplish this it was necessary to rise at seven o'clock, before light had fallen on the great city ; to tub and dress by the feeble flame of a single candle ; to swallow a cup of coffee, accompanied by a slice or two of baker's bread—how different from the noble home-made loaves of Warham !—and then to sally hastily forth into the streets—always mud-laden, frequently shrouded in sulphurous fogs—and to join the

mighty stream of humanity that daily between eight and nine rolled eastward to pursue the thousand and one honourable avocations that have led our neighbours, in pure envy, to dub us a nation of shopkeepers, a character, be it said, infinitely preferable to a reputation for unbridled profligacy and unblushing vice.

He had taken a couple of small rooms on the second floor in a house in Great Ormond Street, the landlady of which had been strongly recommended by Mr. Bonham's cashier. Here in his days of single bliss Mr. Nugget had lodged, and apparently with greater satisfaction than his stuccoed villa at Peckham Rye now afforded him, if the tales he delighted to pour into George's ear of convivial gatherings and oysters and porter, partaken of at unnameable hours of the morning, were any criterion. Mrs. Klipper for her part was equally voluble on the merits of the cashier, whom she always regarded as the paragon of lodgers, and whose praises she thrust down George's throat both in and out of season, until the young man heartily wished that this model had been a trifle less exemplary, or that the present Mrs. Nugget had never taken him from a sphere in which his virtues were so admirably adapted to shine. Bravely as the lad bore up it must not be supposed that the sudden change in his position had not affected him

deeply, or that he could accommodate himself without repining to underbred companions, dingy lodgings, and their accompanying discomforts—a frowzy cinder-wench with ever smutty visage and towzled hair, a loquacious and vulgar landlady, ill-dressed food; in short, a general deterioration of all surroundings, and a sense of loneliness that was almost insupportable.

Many a time did the devil tempt him to sally forth and join some of his fellow-clerks in their foolish but not vicious midnight frolics. These harmless young Lotharios seemed to lead a happy enough life on their scanty salaries, to frequent theatres, smoke cigars, and give bouquets or gloves to their Pollies and Jennies, yet he shrank instinctively from their companionship; and, though ready enough to listen patiently to the recital of their revelries, he could never be brought to join in them, and would have been doubtless dubbed a milksop had he not shown on more than one occasion that, if slow at taking offence, he was prompt enough in resenting an injury, and always ready to take his own part. Luckily he had plenty of books, and the companionship afforded by these in some measure recompensed him; still the winter evenings were dull and dreary and at times he felt indescribably lonely. Andrew Bonham had at first often asked him to his

house in South Kensington, and the young man had availed himself of these invitations several times ; but on noticing that none of his brother-clerks were similarly favoured he had discontinued his visits, not disguising from the principal his reasons for so doing. Without letting it be known that he did so the merchant kept a careful watch over his ward, and soon saw that he need entertain little anxiety regarding his future, for now, having surmounted the preliminary stages of his mercantile education, George had begun to take an interest in his work and showed a great desire to master all its details.

It has been already mentioned that the house of Andrew Bonham had commercial relations with most parts of the world, and particularly with Russia, and George's services had on more than one occasion been useful when French or German clients had called in the absence of the clerks belonging to those nations. Early in life he had displayed a singular aptitude for languages ; and now, seeing how useful these would be to him, and what a lift a knowledge of them would give, he determined to brush up his French and German, with both of which he had already a very fair acquaintance, and then to devote himself to the study of a far more difficult language than either—Russian.

How to carry out these plans he hardly knew, for the foreign clerks attached to the house were a very supercilious set of young gentlemen and not at all disposed to impart their gifts to one who might in the future become a formidable rival. But Providence provided a *Deus ex machinâ* in this wise.

On reaching his home one evening George stumbled over a pail in the passage, and in the next moment was precipitated to the ground by catching his foot in a mat left doubled up in a wholly unwonted position. At the clatter and the exclamation of impatience that escaped from the young man's lips Mrs. Klipper appeared candle in hand, and a look of eagerness upon her face that he knew from experience betokened the possession of some important secret, of which the good lady was burning to deliver herself. But, although a sieve would prove a safer holder of water than Mrs. Klipper of any secret, she wisely held that the possession of one immensely enhanced her personal importance; so, though bubbling over with the restraint, she communicated her tidings with a circumlocution that provoked her unhappy listener beyond measure, but which it is by no means intended to reproduce here for the trial of the reader's patience. After a good ten minutes spent in cruising round and round the subject, now nearing

it cautiously and anon retreating to approach it from an opposite direction—as a shark may dally with the pork-baited hook—Mrs. Klipper unburdened her mind, and was much chagrined to remark that the important news produced little or no effect upon her listener. The advent of a new lodger in the drawing-room, an event that had led to the domestic upheavals from which George's shins were still suffering, might be of paramount interest to Mrs. Klipper, but could by no possibility concern the occupant of the second floor, beyond giving birth to the reflection that, whereas hitherto his chop had been underdone and his tea tepid, the former would now, in all probability, be scarcely warmed through, whilst the latter beverage would assuredly prove stone-cold.

Such thoughts certainly passed through George's mind as he made his way cautiously up the dark stairs, and he had altogether forgotten the existence of the new lodger when there came a tapping at the door, and Mrs. Klipper duly appeared, wiping her forehead with a very dingy apron, and sighing deeply as she sank down (uninvited) upon a chair.

"Lor, Mr. Donnington," she exclaimed, on recovering her breath, "of all the troubles that ever was lodgers is the worst, and first-floor fronts worser than any."

"What is the matter now?" asked George, with a good-humoured smile, and laying down his book in despair; for he well knew what it portended when the good lady took a seat.

"All lodgers is alike," she continued, taking up her parable afresh—"leastways present company and Mr. Nugget always excepted—and a poor woman need have the legs of Andrōkōlēs and his lion for the life they lead her running up and down stairs; and that little lazy hussy, Sarah, she goes flirting with Sam Tugwell, the butcher's man, and lets the fire clean out whilst I am busy a-washing down the landing; and now the new lodger he wants a pair of candles—won't have a lamp in the room, he says, nor in the house either if he had his way—and Sarah, she have been gone this last 'arf hour for some wood; and please, Mr. Donnington, can you spare me a couple of your candles, for I aint got none, only ha'penny tallers, and they aint fit for the likes of him."

The above speech was rattled out with extraordinary volubility, and without the smallest break, one sentence being run into the other regardless of sense, the general effect of which was to reduce the listener to a condition of bewilderment bordering on imbecility.

Trivial though this circumstance may appear, it was,

nevertheless, a link in the chain of events that will be hereafter recorded ; for, had Sarah minded the fire instead of flirting, she would not have had to go out for wood, and Mrs. Klipper would have sent her to buy candles instead of borrowing them from George.

On the following evening Donnington was sitting in his arm-chair, reading and smoking, when a heavy footstep was heard ascending the stairs, followed by a smart rap at the door, which immediately opened, and a man with a long, bushy beard appeared, who carried in his hand a couple of candles.

“ Good evening, Mr. Donnington,” cried the newcomer, smiling, and showing a set of teeth that would have made the fortune of any dentist, “ you see I know your name—indeed, I have had you brought to my notice by our good landlady as a lodger whose example I should do well to follow. I have come to return the candles you so kindly lent me. Donnington !—Donnington !”—he continued, slowly, “ surely that is an old Yorkshire name that seems familiar to me.”

“ Won’t you sit down ? ” said George, who was taken with the man’s manner. “ Here is tobacco and plenty of pipes—cigars, I regret to say, I cannot offer you. Yes, we are from the north country originally,” he

continued; "but my grandfather moved south, and I know nothing of the old county."

The stranger had taken the offered seat, had selected, filled, and lighted the oldest of George's pipes, and now took up the book that the latter had been reading on his entry.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "'Nathan der Weise,' a magnificent drama—one of Lessing's best, I think. I saw it admirably put on the stage at Vienna some few years ago."

The speaker was a man of about forty, plainly, though neatly, dressed, but, from his tone, evidently a gentleman, and, if appearances did not belie him, a soldier, and a cavalry man to boot. He saw that his host was embarrassed, and, at a loss how to continue the conversation, so commenced reading aloud the beautiful passage where Recha describes her preservation from fire by the Templar. "You should have heard Louise Steinberg deliver that speech, and you would have long remembered it."

He had recited the few lines with an ease, precision, and purity of accent that called forth the admiration of his listener, at which, however, he only laughed pleasantly, and, seeming to read the curiosity that mani-

fested itself in his companion's countenance, he said, quietly :

“ A thousand to one that I can guess what is passing in your thoughts at this moment. You are wondering who I am, and how I come to speak German so fluently. We are already neighbours, and, from what I can see, we are likely to be friends, so it is nothing but fair that you should know a little about the man who has so unceremoniously invaded your room. My history, happily, contains no secrets, which is the luckier for me, as I should assuredly reveal them to the first person who questioned me. My name is Frederick Coventry—usually abbreviated to Fred. or Fritz—and I am the second son of a good old Yorkshire family—my elder brother is high sheriff this year, I hear. I need not trouble you with the circumstances, but I quarrelled with my people—with both my father and brother—so I ran away from home and enlisted in an Austrian cavalry regiment. I had been educated at Heidelberg, so could speak German well, and my fondness for horses—a family failing,” he added, laughingly—“made me choose that arm of the service. I cannot say that I found the life unpleasant, for some of my comrades were men of education and birth, while a Yorkshire back-throw which I was compelled to exercise on a

half-drunken trooper who insulted me so astonished the rougher element amongst my companions that I was ever afterwards left in peace and quiet. During the Franco-Austrian war I saw a little service, and was present at both Magenta and Solferino ; but soon after the conclusion of peace I stumbled across an advertisement in an old English paper, which stated that if Frederick Coventry would communicate with certain gentlemen in Staple Inn it would be to his advantage ; whilst any one giving information of his whereabouts, or death, would be rewarded. I wrote to England at once, and heard in reply that my poor father had died eighteen months before, leaving me a legacy of ten thousand pounds. I was now tired of soldiering, so bought my discharge and came to London. Looking about for something to do, I wandered over to Paris, arriving there early in June, and, hearing that the Grand Prix was to be run on the day after my arrival, I, like a good Yorkshireman, took care to be present. I have already said that I was very fond of horses, and I flatter myself that I am no bad judge of their merits. When I returned to my hotel that evening I was a richer man by twelve thousand pounds—had more than doubled my original capital. Since that hour I have never put a penny on a horse. But, perhaps, this long

yarn about a total stranger is only boring you," he remarked, stopping to fill and re-light his pipe; "however, we are nearing the end now. The greater portion of my money I invested in Continental and American railways, keeping back a few thousands to purchase a share in any business that presented itself, and that I thought likely to suit me; for a life of idleness would have driven me mad in six months. With this object in view I travelled about Europe for a year or more, and when I was almost beginning to despair I stumbled by accident upon the very thing that I wanted. Providence had directed my footsteps to Carthagena, in Murcia, and there I met an Englishman who had established pottery-works in the neighbourhood, but now found himself unable to work them from want of funds. After due inquiry I saw that the concern would pay, and that it would afford me just the amount of employment I require, so I became a partner, and we soon had the business in working order. I now spend my time about equally between England, France, and Spain, searching in the two former countries for new designs, as it is the intention of my partner and myself to educate the Spanish national taste in our own peculiar branch—but, believe me, they are a race that require a mighty deal of

teaching. Such is my history, and I hope that there is nothing in it to prevent our being friends whilst we live under the same roof. Perhaps, also, if you are a little weak in your German I could be of service to you."

From that evening every spare moment that George could command he passed with his new friend. Coventry was a man of the simplest tastes and lived upon a diet almost Spartan in its plainness. His opinions were, as the younger man soon found out, those of a very advanced Liberal; he carried his cosmopolitan radicalism indeed to the verge of socialism, and his greatest pleasure was to take George in the evenings to the various resorts of the kindred spirits in whose society he delighted, and there to hold forth in glowing terms on the evils of monarchy and the liberties of the sovereign people. And yet the man was not disloyal. He always spoke of the Queen and of the members of the royal family with respect, and regarded the Emperor of Austria with even affection—a feeling which he extended to the Empress on account of her love for hunting. He had in a rough and varied life imbibed democratic ideas, and the ideal simplicity of republicanism exactly suited his tastes.

Nightly, therefore, George accompanied him to the haunts of socialism, usually a restaurant or café near

Soho, where, after dining cheaply, the inmates proceeded to express their dissatisfaction with the conduct of things in general, and seemed to advocate with much zeal—more particularly the out-at-elbows portion of the gathering—a general demolition of the present landmarks that guide good citizens, without bestowing a thought on the erection of others in their place. In this way George had daily opportunities of talking and listening to voluble harangues in nearly every European language. Rabid German socialists in impassioned gutturals denounced the Houses of Hapsburg and Hohenzollern; French communists shrieked out anathemas on the republic that had risen by their exertions and now left them in poverty and exile; dark-visaged and soldier-like looking Poles clustered together and ever and anon broke forth into deep invectives against the Autocrat of the Russias. They were a strange medley. Some, like Coventry, were men of education and refinement, who really believed in the theories they broached, and had testified by loss of country and estate to their devotion to a mistaken political creed; others, however, had never owned a pure aspiration, but belonged, as their ignoble envious features too surely betrayed, to that discontented residuum which is to be found in every great city, who craftily incite better men

than themselves to sedition in order that they may benefit their worthless selves during the turmoil. To all these, however, George listened, and with the better class talked freely, whilst such subversive conversation as he heard hurt him no whit. In a couple of months he had acquired considerable fluency in French and German, and knew all that was needful for practical purposes, and he therefore mentioned to Coventry his wish of learning Russian.

"Now you get beyond me," said the ex-trooper. "I possess a smattering of most modern languages—can even abuse a cabman in Hungarian—but Russian I never tackled. However, I am very glad you mentioned it to me; for I find I must be off to Carthagena next week, and I will make inquiry of some of our friends before I start. I have never been mixed up with the Russian revolutionary party, but believe they hang out chiefly in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel. I will find out all about it to-night."

The final evening before Coventry's departure had now arrived, and George was sitting with him smoking and talking over the past and future, when he suddenly said, "By-the-bye, Alphonse Rouget—you remember the man I mean, a little fellow with an imperial and small black eyes that are never still a moment; we met

him at the Café Sablonière—well, I asked Rouget about a Russian, and it seems that he knows exactly the man to suit you. He gave me his name, here it is—Mathias Ralowski, a Polish nobleman, I believe. Whenever you like to tell Rouget he will bring you both together.”

After his friend had quitted England George felt more lonely than ever. The evenings hung heavily on hand, for he did not care to visit the revolutionary restaurants and cafés alone, and the elements of the Russian language are not an enlivening study. Suddenly the thought that he had never yet applied for leave struck him. All his brother-clerks had done so in turns, and visited their respective friends; he only had remained steadily at work, and now the longing for fresh country-air had come upon him with the sweet month of August. But where should he go? He had money enough to give him a few weeks at the sea-side, or should he run over to Paris? His aunt had written to say that she would always be glad to see him at Morecambe Park, but he felt an invincible repugnance, the cause of which he was unable to explain, to meeting Sir Edward, and besides the invitation was now half a year old. That his health demanded a change he felt

conscious, and the very idea of fresh fields and rippling streams made him long for the moment when he should be among them.

All anxiety however as to the direction in which he should turn his steps was removed by a letter from Eva, in which she mentioned that her holidays would of necessity be spent at Throstle House, with no other companionship than that of the youngest Miss Quilter, the two elder ladies of that name having made up their minds to a Swiss tour during the vacation. This settled the matter, and George immediately wrote, asking his sister to find out some quiet little nook among the Yorkshire dales where they could spend a happy fortnight together, and where he perhaps might have a little fishing. In a few days she replied that just such a place existed on the banks of the Yore, near the falls of Aysgarth. No village was in the immediate neighbourhood, but she had heard of a comfortable farmhouse, where they could board and lodge at a very moderate expense. Also the Yore trout were very fine; whilst, if the waters were not open—a fact of which she seemed in doubt—permission to fish could be obtained without much trouble.

George's application for leave was not made to the

head of the house in person, but conveyed to him through the manager. When the hour for closing arrived that gentleman informed him that three weeks lay at his disposal ; “ And remember, Donnington,” he added, “ that if you want another week or so you have only to write to me and you can have it. You have stuck to your work well, and both Mr. Bonham and I are much pleased with you.”

This announcement gave the young man great pleasure, which was increased by his receiving that night a few lines from his guardian, which ran thus :—

“ Mildmay tells me you want a little leave; pray take it, for it has been fairly earned. Both he and Nugget speak in the highest terms of your general conduct, and there seems no doubt that you possess a great aptitude for business, and that if you continue in your present course you will succeed. I suppose you think of running down to Yorkshire and seeing your sister. You will be glad to hear that the reports I receive from the Misses Quilter concerning her proficiency and general conduct are excellent. Make it your business to find out if she is thoroughly happy at Throstle House, or if I could do anything to add to her comfort. The inclosed may perhaps be useful to you. Don't be foolishly proud and refuse it, for remember that you are

my ward for the next six months to come, and that I am only using my prerogative as

“ Your guardian and faithful friend,

“ ANDREW BONHAM.”

The inclosure alluded to was a crisp fifty-pound Bank of England note, which George however would not have retained, so determined was he to work his own way unaided, unless he had plainly perceived that its rejection would only have mortified his employer. The next night he passed at the Strafford Arms at Wakefield, and was awoke on the following morning by the chimes ringing forth from the old church tower.

CHAPTER III.

TAKEN UNAWARES.

THE sun was scarcely above the horizon when George leapt out of bed, threw open the window, and, leaning forth, joyously inhaled the balmy breeze of a lovely August morning. By more than eighteen months of hard work in the crowded capital he had thoroughly earned the reward of a holiday, and the next three weeks at least would be passed in the company of his only sister. Had she grown? Had she fulfilled all her early promise of rich beauty? Was she happy? Had so long a sojourn under the roof-tree of the erudite Misses Quilter turned the frank, high-spirited girl of old Warham days into a self-sufficient petticoated prig, steeped to the brows in 'ologies? All these thoughts

rushed through his mind as he hastily dressed and prepared to sally forth for an early exploration. The people of the inn would not give him breakfast for a couple of hours, and these he could while away in inspecting the town, and in ascertaining the exact situation of Throstle House.

After a good look at the Calder, to the bridge over which with a fisherman's instinct he bent his way, George made inquiries concerning the school, which seemed almost one of the institutions of Wakefield, for the woman in the shop at which he asked for Throstle House seemed to regard his ignorance with astonishment not unmingled with contempt. "Wherever do you come from, sir," she exclaimed with raised eyebrows, "not to know the Miss Quilters? Every one in the Three Ridings knows they."

The young man pleaded guilty to great remissness in this respect, and, having explained that he was a stranger, the lady, somewhat mollified, put him in the right road, for the school lay within five minutes' walk of the bridge.

"You don't happen to know at what time they are usually stirring?" he asked, emboldened by the woman's manner to continue the conversation, and, if possible, to gain an independent opinion concerning the

establishment from an outsider, "or if the Misses Quilter are now at home?"

"I don't know nothing about them nor their going on," was the reply; "but they are the talk of the whole town with their Papist ways. They think too much of forms and ceremonies for a plain woman like me."

From this George concluded that the ladies in question had a leaning towards Ritualism, and that such a tendency stank in the nostrils of his informant, who was not likely to say anything in their favour, so he departed, and soon found himself at the railings that separated the school from the road. A considerable space of garden lay in front of the house; and, peeping through the laurel-hedge that formed a leafy screen, and shut out the gaze of the multitude, George saw a young lady, clad in a light brown holland dress, with huge gauntleted gloves and a large sun-hat, busily engaged in trimming certain rose-bushes and in cutting the opening buds, which she carefully placed in the little wicker-basket that hung on her arm. The face was turned away from him, and for some minutes he watched every movement of the tall, graceful figure with admiration and a beating heart, for something seemed to whisper that the fair young gardener was his sister, yet the change seemed too great to have been effected in eighteen

months. Oh that she would just turn her head for one instant! but the girl was completely engrossed in her occupation, and the young man was on the point of passing on to the gate to resolve his doubts when a bell rang loudly within the house, and the young lady, desisting from her task, raised her head and afforded him an opportunity of seeing her full face. There was no longer any possibility of mistake: it was Eva, the wild, merry child of other days, now a beautiful and graceful girl, fast ripening into perfect womanhood.

The meeting between the brother and sister was over, George had been dragged into the house, robbed of his hat and stick by the excited girl, had been introduced to Miss Dorothea Quilter, and was now seated at the breakfast-table, where, had he eaten half the good things with which the two ladies endeavoured to cram his plate, it would have gone hard with his digestion, efficient as that piece of internal mechanism always showed itself. Miss Dolly seemed unable to divest herself of the idea that a journey from London to Yorkshire must expose the traveller to all the horrors of starvation. In vain poor George—after devouring half a chicken, several slices of ham and much buttered tea-cake—assured her that the trip only occupied a few

hours; that his host of the "Strafford Arms" had given him a most excellent and plentiful repast on his arrival; and that a good night's rest had wholly removed all fatigue; the good-natured little woman was not to be convinced; and when the young man finally rose from table watched him with much anxiety, thinking that a fainting-fit from want of nourishment might at any moment stretch him prostrate on the carpet.

Much was said by brother and sister as, in the bright sunshine, they walked to and fro in the recreation-ground at the back of the house, a large open space defended by high walls from all inquiring eyes, where, as a special mark of her favour, Miss Dolly had permitted the young man to smoke his pipe, a license hitherto unexampled in the records of Throstle House.

Each was quietly employed in remarking the change that time had wrought in the other, and the result of the inspection was equally pleasing to both. Eva found her brother developed into a fine handsome young man, still full of fun and good-humour, but evidencing a stability of character called forth by the trials and temptations to which he had been subjected, and to which he had, on the whole, risen superior. It must not be inferred from this that he had never become entangled in any scrapes, or had shown himself in all

respects an Admirable Crichton. George was by no means without a very fair proportion of failings, but pride—deep-rooted and obstinate—had prevented him from falling into the toils of debt and other less creditable escapades, which so frequently engulf the unwary youth thrown in experienced into the allurements and temptations of a great city.

Neither had the brother less cause to be proud of the sister now walking by his side. That she was, and would be more, beautiful was apparent, and her mind seemed in perfect uniformity with the lovely casket enclosing it. All George's fears lest the dreaded 'ologies had transformed her into a stilted blue-stockings vanished within ten minutes of their meeting. That she was most accomplished could not be wholly concealed, but the discovery dawned upon him gradually and evidently without any intention on the girl's part. Lively and cheerful, yet innocent as a child, she appeared to her delighted brother all that his fondest dreams could have pictured, and he bestowed much heartfelt but inward praise on the ladies who had so ably supplied a mother's vacant place, and had given him as a sister a true English girl—modest, pure, and loving.

It was arranged that they should start immediately

after luncheon for Leyburn, from which place they could take a conveyance to the farmhouse which for the next three weeks was to be their home. Poor little Miss Dolly vainly attempted to conceal her sorrow at parting from her young companion, but found some consolation in providing a gigantic heap of sandwiches for the travellers.

“Good bye, Mr. Donnington,” she cried, shaking George heartily by the hand, whilst a few unbidden tears sparkled in her kindly eyes; “take great care of your sister; and, Eva dear, mind you bring me several good roots of the oak-fern. Good-bye, dear, and a happy holiday! Don’t lose the sandwiches; you are sure to be hungry. Good-bye!” And so the fly rolled away to the station, and by evening the young people had arrived at their destination.

The principal reason why Eva had selected this retreat was that, whilst it combined the advantages of beautiful scenery and good fishing for George, she would be within a mile of her school-friend, Edith Marsden, whose father owned considerable property in the West Riding. When her brother made such long excursions as to forbid her accompanying him, she could always be sure of a hearty welcome from Edith, and thus no moment would seem dull. Perhaps, also,

some vague thought of an attachment springing up between George and her friend had occurred to the girl's mind. Miss Marsden was a great heiress, and also very pretty and amiable, and such a match would relieve them both from all anxiety about the future, and would convert her bosom-friend into a sister in reality. As is the fashion with girls, she had often talked of her brother, and had awakened some curiosity in Edith regarding him; now they would be brought together in a beautiful and romantic country, and who could foresee what might not arise therefrom? It is not positively stated that such a plot was present in its entirety to Eva when she selected the vicinity of her friend's home for the autumn holiday; but it, perhaps, had unwittingly some share in determining the locality in which the vacation should be spent.

Had the girl, however, ever seriously entertained such a hope, the first week showed her that it was foredoomed to remain unfulfilled. Edith's liveliness and quickness of repartee amused George, but it was abundantly evident that he regarded that young lady solely in the light of his sister's companion and friend, and that his heart was wholly untouched by either her beauty or the acres that would be hers. And yet the thought had not escaped the young man that, by winning this

girl, he could assume his proper position, and need struggle no more against the adverse fortune which had become his by inheritance. But the very idea of owing all to his wife made him dismiss the scheme as impossible of execution, whilst his old safeguard—pride—had resolutely combated the thought from its birth. In herself Edith was nice enough, and would, undoubtedly, make a man very happy; but, in position, she was far his inferior, and hence the thing could never be. No harm had been done yet on either side; let them, for the future, keep as far apart as courtesy would permit.

So George went daily in pursuit of the trout, either alone, or, if the water was near enough, accompanied by Eva. She had plenty of occupation, for the neighbourhood abounded with beautiful scenery, which she could transfer to the pages of her sketch-book, and both hills and valleys were rich in wild flowers and ferns, which she took great pleasure in searching for, gathering, and classifying. On rainy days—and, happily, but two of these occurred—Edith sent the carriage over for her (George insisted on staying at home), and thus the time passed very happily and peacefully for both, so much so that the young man resolved to avail

himself of Mr. Mildmay's offer and prolong his absence for another week.

But now even this extension had drawn to a close, and the last day had arrived which they were to spend at the farm. Eva had devoted this to a mountain ramble, for the purpose of securing the oak-ferns that Miss Dolly desired ; while George had determined to have one final trial for a big fish that had twice baffled him beneath the falls of Aysgarth.

Whilst putting his rod together, the young man remarked that he had a rival on the opposite bank of the river, and one apparently of no mean skill from the frequency with which he brought a fish to land. The weather had in the morning presented a threatening appearance, and it had seemed probable that heavy rain would spoil the last day's sport ; but the storm had apparently broken higher up the dale, for the black pall of clouds cleared away, and that the fish were on the feed was evidenced by George's hooking one at the first cast. Engrossed in his sport, the young man had ceased to think of his brother-angler on the opposite bank, but, happening to glance in that direction, he was astonished to see the stranger making frantic gesticulations, now pointing to the fall, and now to the

almost perpendicular cliffs between which the river ran at that part.

“ Can the fellow have gone mad ? ” thought George. “ What the deuce makes him wave his arms about like a windmill ? Pity that the roar of water prevents my hearing what he says.”

The thunder of the fall was so great as completely to drown the human voice, but suddenly its dull continuous bellow was increased tenfold, and glancing at the rapid George soon saw the cause of the stranger's excited behaviour. The storm of the morning had broken higher up the dale, had greatly swollen the Yore and its numerous minor tributaries, and now a surging mass of water was pouring over the lip of the cataract. Utterly bewildered at so unexpected a danger, all retreat cut off by the precipitous cliffs in his rear, the young man stood for one moment in uncertainty ; then, throwing away rod and creel, scrambled up into a small pollard willow that stood on the bank. Nor was he an instant too soon, for the raging waters reached his feet as he gained the summit of the tree, which shook and quivered beneath the violent pressure of the current.

Less than a minute, however, convinced him that this haven offered no safety. Higher and higher

mounted the peat-stained torrent, and now to his dismay he felt the tree giving way. Many a similar freshet had that stubborn old willow stood, for its roots were firmly embedded in the rich loam of the bank, but the present was one of most unusual severity, and at every moment the trunk declined more and more before the foaming waters. The deafening roar of the fall added to the horrors of the situation. George saw whirled past him uprooted trees, fragments of hurdles that had been dashed to pieces in their descent, and the carcasses of several sheep, but nothing buoyant enough to support his weight in the eddying stream. He cast a hurried glance on both sides to see if any human being was visible who might give encouragement, if not render assistance, but to all appearance he was utterly alone—alone with the thundering waters at his feet, those waters that an hour ago had looked so peaceful, but now threatened to prove his grave.

And now the tree had yielded so much that its occupant was already half submerged. Another moment and it must give entirely, when he would be precipitated into the stream, and might become entangled in its feathery network. George was courageous and a good swimmer, and had no intention of surrendering his life without a struggle, so, pausing only to rid himself of

his coat and boots, he slid into the torrent, and immediately felt himself carried along by it at racing-pace.

His main object was to keep afloat simply, not to exhaust his strength by vain efforts to reach the bank, and this alone taxed his utmost powers, for now he was hurried into some eddy that sucked him beneath the surface, whirled him round and round, and from which he only escaped buffeted and breathless; now a tree lay in his path, and he had to exert his utmost skill to avoid contact with its treacherous branches.

Good three hundred yards had he travelled in less than three minutes, and now he felt that the struggle could be continued little longer. Once he had been caught in the arms of a revolving tree, and had been twice pressed ruthlessly beneath the water before he could clear himself. He was battered, bruised, and faint—the end must soon come.

The roar of the fall was now much diminished by the distance, and just as despair was creeping over the young man its place gave way to hope, for a voice distinctly reached him, bidding him hold up, that help would soon arrive. Looking towards the bank he saw his rival, the fisherman who had endeavoured to draw his attention to the danger, running down to the river

with a plank on his shoulder, which he launched into the water, following it himself and guiding it towards the imperilled swimmer. Hope now took firm possession of the latter, for, could he but keep afloat until this ark was reached, he would be safe. How slow the progress made by his gallant helper appeared! and how terribly his last remnant of strength seemed to forsake him at this the critical moment!

And again despair seizes him as he feels that it is no use—that he must give up. The saving plank is still several yards distant, and as many seconds would place it within his reach, but no—further effort is in vain—he sinks.

Yes, sinks; but scarcely to disappear beneath the surface before a strong hand has clutched him firmly by the arm, and his head is again raised to the daylight which he had thought was lost to him for ever. A few vigorous strokes and the stranger has brought his burden to the plank, which nobly supports them both, and after being carried down another couple of hundred yards they are dragged to land by some labourers on the bank.

George was too much exhausted to walk, so the peasants laid boughs and coats on an unhinged gate and carried him to an adjacent farm-house, where every attention was shown him, and a lad despatched with a

note to Eva, asking her to send dry clothing by the bearer. The young man's first inquiry had been concerning his preserver, but was told that he had gone away, finding that George was in no danger, and had left word that he would call and see him in the evening. Donnington had on several occasions visited this homestead whilst fishing, and the inmates knew who he was and where he lived.

"And you really would have been drowned but for him?" cried Eva, her eyes filling as she thought of the narrow escape her only brother had just sustained. "Oh, how grateful I shall always be to him!"

"Yes, it would have been a bad wind-up to a happy month," said George, who, excepting a little weakness and many bruises, was none the worse for the morning's adventure. "I wonder how far my rod has got down the Yore by this time?"

"How can you think of a wretched rod, George, when all your thoughts should be concentrated on your preserver and upon . . . ? but I hear footsteps; this must be him."

A young man of very prepossessing appearance, clad in a light shooting-jacket, knickerbockers, and a felt-hat, about which several gut-traces armed with flies

were wound, was shown into the room, and both brother and sister hurried to meet him.

"I owe you my brother's life!" cried Eva, in a voice almost choked with emotion, as she frankly extended her hand to the stranger, who seemed a little confused at the unexpected appearance of this beautiful girl amongst the Yorkshire dales.

"Yes; but for your pluck and timely assistance I was gone," said George, and, though his words were commonplace enough, there was an earnest ring in them that showed how deeply the speaker felt on the subject.

"You overrate what I did," replied the fisherman, with increasing embarrassment, a blush mounting to the roots of his fair hair. "You yourself—any one who had chanced to be by—would have acted in precisely the same manner. You see that in reality I ran no danger whatever. I knew the plank was there, for by my own order my men had laid it across a beck as a temporary bridge. The whole thing is not worth talking about. You feel none the worse, I trust?"

"Barring a few bruises and scratches, I am quite sound again," replied George; "but I never want another struggle with the Yore in flood."

"Yes, those freshets are awkward, and often do considerable damage; but they subside in a very few hours.

I have seen several during my stay in this neighbourhood, but never one approaching in severity that of to-day."

"You are a visitor then, also?" asked George.

"No," answered the young man, smiling pleasantly ; "not a visitor in the sense that you are. Duty brings me to this lovely spot, and it is not every day that I can find time to throw a fly—though I do pretty well," he added, seeing Eva's eyes fixed on his hat and its piscatorial garnishing, "and never lose a chance. I am a civil engineer, just at present in charge of a party constructing a new telegraph line. My work has afforded me a thorough knowledge of the country. I could show you," he said to Eva, whilst pointing to the roots of oak-fern that lay in a corner of the room, "where to get cartloads of those, and other rare and beautiful flowers that love a limestone district. Every turn of your enemy, the Yore, has been explored by me," he continued, now addressing George, "and I have found out the holes in which the fattest trout lie. These it will be a great pleasure to me to show you—a true pleasure, for I am often a little lonely."

"What a pity that we should not have met sooner!" cried George, "for unfortunately we have run the full length of an extended tether, and must leave to-morrow.

It is a thousand pities, but now please tell me to whom I am indebted for my life ? ”

“ My name is Middleton—Arthur Middleton, and I am generally to be found or heard of at the Whitehall Club. Now, good-bye ! I heartily wish that you were going to stay on.”

So the two young men thus strangely thrown together parted, but the whirligig of fortune will bring them again together, and other circumstances equally unexpected by either.

CHAPTER IV.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

STRENGTHENED and invigorated, both mentally and bodily—for the ill effects of his adventure in the Yore passed off in a day or two—George, on his return to town, devoted himself to business with renewed activity, and even the formidable Russian verbs seemed less difficult since the pleasant Yorkshire holiday. Every evening he passed in studying that language, and at length thought himself well enough grounded in the elementary portion to take advantage of Coventry's kindness and seek out the Polish refugee, Mathias Ralowski. To effect this it was necessary to find M. Rouget, and George lost several days in attempting to unearth that gentleman, whose private address was

either unknown to his associates or they considered it unwise to reveal it to one of the uninitiated. At last the young man succeeded in meeting him, and it was arranged that Ralowski should be brought by the Frenchman to Great Ormond Street on the following day.

Knowing the modest style in which the foreign refugees usually live, George had made no preparations for the reception of his guests beyond laying in a good store of cigars and cigarettes and a couple of bottles of claret. In due course they arrived; he was formally introduced to Count Ralowski; and the Frenchman shortly afterwards took his departure leaving Donnington and the Pole together. Now, it must be freely confessed that what George had seen of exiles in general had not commended them greatly to his favour, and as a rule he would have been loath to associate on intimate terms with most of the fraternity. Alphonse Rouget he had frequently met at the restaurants, and Fred Coventry had reported him to be a man of honour who might be relied upon, but of this Pole he knew absolutely nothing, and an almost instinctive repugnance rose in his heart on first beholding him. Five minutes, however, after they had been left alone this feeling had entirely vanished and had been

replaced by one of wonder that so amiable an individual could ever have called upon his head the wrath of any authorities, however implacable.

Pleasant voices George had heard in plenty—we have no lack of them in England—but one more melodious than his present companion's, more modulated, more sweet from the soft undercurrent of melancholy pervading it, he had never encountered. The slight accent which was perceptible in his otherwise excellent English rather increased than detracted from the charm of his conversation, which seemed to bind the listener like the liquid notes of some great artiste. How different was this man from the noisy mouthing agitators to whom George had been accustomed to listen. His lips never gave vent to shrieks and imprecations that seemed with the others part and parcel of their stock in trade. Only when he recounted his history—the old, old story of aspirations for freedom, and the struggle to re-establish a demolished nationality—did all the fire of his martial ancestors flash in the Count's eyes, and his rich voice grew deeper and more touching as he told of scenes witnessed by himself—of noble matrons and maidens imprisoned and tortured; of men whose only fault consisted in an ardent patriotism, seized imprisoned, scourged, executed. But no unseemly out-

bursts marred the effect of his recital ; and, when the perpetrators of these atrocities were named, a vein of pity for such unhappy beings was distinctly traceable amidst the natural abhorrence their enormities called forth.

How could such a man fail to fascinate a youth like George, whose every feeling of fair play, chivalry, and justice felt wounded at seeing one so highly gifted an exile and a wanderer from the land of his fathers ? And the kindly interest displayed by the Count in the object his host had at heart gratified the young man. He offered to take George where he would meet Russians with whom he might converse, and also expressed his readiness to read with him once or twice a week.

“Perhaps you will wonder,” he said, with a sad smile, “how my tongue can frame the accents of a language whose possessors have wrought such evil to me and mine, or indeed how I, being a Pole, come to understand it at all. But my quarrel does not extend to the language, though I learnt it in a dreary school—the yard of a fortress prison.”

This offer greatly embarrassed the young man. He was not rich enough to pay a large fee for instruction, and even had he been so he would have shrunk from mentioning such a subject to the Count. This gentle-

man seemed to read what was passing in George's mind, for, looking him earnestly in the face, he said, "I can tell what troubles you. Dismiss it from your mind. I am not destitute like many of my poor countrymen, and all my moderate wants are fully supplied. As a friend I offered my services; as a friend I shall feel you equally bound to make use of them. Now, good night, and, if convenient to yourself, you may expect me every Wednesday evening until further notice," and with a courteous salutation the Count, having enveloped himself in the folds of his cloak, withdrew.

George was delighted. Fortune had certainly befriended him in this instance. "And what a splendid fellow Ralowski is," he thought; "how his eyes flashed when he described the Polish irregulars dashing through the Russian ranks; and when he came to that scene in which his mother and aunt were brought before General M—— I had difficulty in refraining from tears. How delighted Eva will be to hear of this stroke of luck. I must let her know at once."

So he wrote a long letter to his sister enlarging on the meeting with Count Ralowski, and dwelling on the great benefits that would accrue to him from this acquaintanceship. This he posted before going to bed,

but with the morning he was astonished to find that the feelings of distrust which at first sight the Count had awakened in him were still present in full force, and he almost regretted having sent off so eulogistic a letter concerning him. Strive as he would to dismiss such fancies as foolish, they nevertheless invariably arose after Ralowski had quitted him, and the spell of his voice was withdrawn. With increasing intimacy, however, they gradually wore off, and the young man became greatly attached to his Polish friend.

George had now completed his twenty-first year, and was by this time of great use in the service of his employer. On more than one occasion he had been sent abroad to transact important business, or to make inquiries, and he had shown such good sense in the fulfilment of these missions that Mr. Bonham had withdrawn him from the more mechanical part of the business, and established him in a confidential position near his own person. He became in fact a sort of private secretary, conducting all the foreign correspondence that the merchant regarded as private, and that he was unwilling to pass before the eyes of the ordinary clerks. This threw him into daily contact with his principal, and he gradually became aware of the true kindness of heart exhibited by the latter in all

dealings with his surroundings and dependants. Many a poor struggling husband was surprised by the receipt of a bank-note, the sender of which he was unable to guess ; many a large anonymous donation was acknowledged in the columns of the Press, the secret of which George could have explained. The young man found his new position most agreeable, and the increased salary and importance it carried with it was in itself pleasant. He was now able to move down to Mrs. Klipper's drawing-room floor, and, by a threat of leaving altogether, to extort more punctuality and attention from that lady ; she only complied, however, with his most reasonable demands under protest, and a muttered grumble at the luxuries demanded by young men of the present age, invariably terminating with the remark that " Mr. Nugget, he didn't want a pack of baths about a poor woman's house, but contented himself with his hot water on Saturday nights, like a Christian "—a statement that George found no difficulty in believing, as, from all outward appearance, the cashier's weekly habits remained unchanged to that very hour.

Among the many foreigners who constantly called to see Mr. Bonham was a Russian gentleman, with whose appearance the young man was greatly struck. Prince Soudakoff was the owner of much property both in the

north and south of Russia, and had been one of the most earnest advocates for the emancipation of the serfs; had indeed allowed his zeal to carry him so far in this direction that he had excited the jealousy and distrust of his brother nobles, and had acquired a character for advanced liberalism which, though in the main undeserved—for he was simply an honest good-hearted man—caused him to be regarded with suspicion and distrust by the St. Petersburg Government. The greatest achievement of modern days, the enfranchisement from cruel bondage of forty millions of people, by Alexander II., had taken place in 1863, and, though the ukase announcing this noble measure was a source of much gratification to the Prince, he could not but soon perceive that under the new order of things his estates had greatly deteriorated in value, and his rent-roll correspondingly diminished. In this respect he was no worse off than other landed proprietors, but, unlike them, he did not sit down in sullen apathy to bewail the past system, but resolutely strove by judicious improvements, and by the establishment of manufactories, to benefit, not only his own property, but also to awaken a spirit of commercial activity amongst the men of his own class. Praiseworthy as the attempt was it met with little success. His brother magnates

regarded the change with the greatest aversion, and could not rid themselves of the idea that the peasantry on their estates were still goods and chattels belonging to the soil, and incapable of rightly using their freedom. From these, his own class, the Prince encountered a passive but powerful resistance, and his efforts for the amelioration of his tenantry were looked upon as resulting from communistic principles, and reported in the most unfavourable light at head-quarters.

But, tenacious as the bear of his native forests, the Prince struggled on, sinking much capital in mills and machinery, and bent on proving to his neighbours that he had adopted the wisest course. It was in vain. The peasantry, like our own Jamaica negroes, proved idle and ungrateful; the mills were fired by some mischievous hand and burnt to the ground: the whole scheme must be abandoned.

Still, the Prince would not avow himself beaten, and determined to try again, but this time in another part of the country. Hitherto his operations had been conducted in the northern portion of the empire, he would now see what could be done in the south, for he was owner of a considerable estate some eighty miles from Odessa. Here, close to a railway and in the neighbourhood of a great commercial city, he

would find people less bigoted and more inclined to listen to reason. A year's residence at Tirapol verified his expectations, and he had come to England to select machinery and to take advice regarding the works he proposed erecting.

For several generations the Soudakoffs had conducted all their financial operations through the house of Bonham, branches of which were established at St. Petersburg and Odessa; and, when the Prince found that his enemies were persistently misrepresenting him to the Government, he had privately remitted a large amount of capital to Andrew for investment in the English Funds. This sum at all events would be safe in case of any catastrophe occurring to himself or the sequestration of his estates, and his knowledge of an autocratic rule warned him that such an event was by no means unlikely.

Such was the man whom George now met almost daily in Andrew's room, and with whom he often held long conversations during the merchant's unavoidable absence, for the Prince did not hesitate to continue the discussion of his schemes with the young man, whom he knew to be trusted implicitly by Andrew Bonham.

Count Ralowski had now become an almost nightly

visitor in Great Ormond Street, and all ceremony between him and his host was at an end. The routine on these occasions never varied. First George repeated aloud several stanzas from Pushkin's poems, which he had previously learnt by heart; then both men lighted a cigar or cigarette, and chatted whilst smoking; after which came some Russian reading, or writing from dictation, followed by a final chat, with tobacco; and then the visitor withdrew.

The interest displayed by Ralowski in all that concerned the house of Bonham seemed inexhaustible; and he always listened with the utmost attention when George dropped hints of new transactions undertaken or large schemes resolved upon.

"Ah!" he remarked on one occasion, "you English are a wonderful nation. For the keenness of sight that can detect an advantageous opening, and the resolute energy with which the new opportunity is seized and acted upon, you stand unequalled. Whilst others are wavering, counting the pros and cons, your capitalists step in, and, presto! the idea is at once converted into an accomplished fact. Believe me, Donnington, you have chosen your career wisely. Commerce is a greater vocation than any other, for the merchant whilst benefiting himself gives employment

to hundreds of busy hands that otherwise might be engaged in tearing each other's throats. The capitalist himself is hardly conscious of the good that he does, but none the less it is surely effected. I, in my younger days, before tyranny drove me forth an exile from my country, tried—and I am vain enough to think, succeeded—to ameliorate the condition of the peasantry on my estate. At a large outlay I established mills and manufactories, advanced money to drain and reclaim marsh lands, and introduced the most modern improvements in agriculture. All was flourishing, and I should have been amply repaid had not the merciless rigour of our conquerors driven my unhappy countrymen to rise and forsake all peaceful pursuits in the fierce struggle for freedom. All innovators are not, however, so fortunate as myself," he concluded, with a sigh.

"There you are right," said George; "I have lately seen a good deal of a man who tried much that you seem to have done, but was as unsuccessful as you were the reverse."

"Really," replied the Count. "Pray tell me more about him. Who knows that I may not some day return to Poland; then the knowledge of his failure will enable me to avoid similar errors."

"He is a Russian landowner who attempted to better the condition of his people by finding them suitable employment. They burnt his mills and showed the utmost ingratitude in return. Yet he is about to erect fresh works in the teeth of this failure. To me it seems a great risk; however, he can afford it."

"You must be speaking of Prince Soudakoff," said the Pole, slowly, with his eyes fixed full upon Donnington's face. "I know of no other man in the empire answering to your description."

"How could you possibly tell that I meant him?" asked George, in much surprise.

"There is little reason to wonder at my knowing the antecedents of the most liberal man in Russia," remarked Ralowski. "Prince Soudakoff is one of us, the future leader of the rising party that will give freedom and liberty of thought to all Eastern Europe. Remember, Donnington," he continued, after a short pause, "that I am telling you this as a friend, upon whose secrecy and discretion I can rely."

"Nothing is likely to escape me," returned the young man, simply. "I only see the Prince when he comes on business to Mr. Bonham."

"He is under considerable suspicion at St. Peters-

burg," said the Count, musingly; "I wonder they permitted him to leave the country."

"How could they detain him?" asked George. "He seems to have done nothing but good, and to have the interests of his country entirely at heart."

"You, as an Englishman, show a very excusable ignorance of the Russian Government," said Ralowski. "Here, such a man as the Prince would be regarded in the light of a public benefactor, tens of thousands of people would sing his praises, and, after his death, statues, of indifferent artistic merit, would be raised to the honour of his memory. There, on the contrary, he is looked upon as an innovator—as one dissatisfied with the present state of the country—as a fanatic, exhibiting all a fanatic's zeal for reform, progress, and the introduction of Western ideas. Many Russians," he continued, "would be pleased to see their country turned into a place like the Corea of the present or the Japan of a few years past. They would exclude all the Western nations, would forbid their citizens from setting foot on Russian soil, and would at the same time prohibit their own people from quitting the land of their birth. Autocratic power, mercilessly wielded, can do much, and by establishing a cordon of sentinels from the Black Sea to the Baltic might

prevent a single human being from crossing the boundary line ; but were each single sentry multiplied into a company—aye, or into a regiment—their united strength would be unequal to prevent the entry of what they chiefly dread—new ideas. The attempt to close a country against these is as hopeless as to lace a maiden in an iron corset, and to say that her heart is love-proof. But I weary you.”

“On the contrary, you interest me exceedingly. Supposing that the authorities had thought it advisable to prevent Prince Soudakoff from leaving the country, on what plea could they have detained him ? ”

A smile, probably occasioned by the innocence of the query, hovered for a moment over the Count's lips, then he said : “Such a Government as that of Russia is never without a pretext for restricting the liberty of the subject. An atmosphere of corruption taints the whole social system, and espionage is rife amongst all classes. No man in that unhappy land knows whom he can trust. The wife of his bosom, the children whom he has straitened himself to sustain and educate, may be noting down every word that he utters in the privacy of his family, and some day, should it be deemed needful, those opinions, carelessly ventilated and long since forgotten, will be produced as damning

evidence against him. The system is simply horrible, and does away with all confidence and the familiar interchange of views and thoughts in which the members of more favoured nations can indulge. You, as an Englishman, cannot realise what it is to have to weigh every word before uttering it,—to place a constant guard over your mouth even when in the presence of those nearest and dearest to you. Here, in England, every man says freely what he likes, restrained only by the unwritten laws of courtesy, which forbid his trenching on any subject that may hurt or offend his neighbour.”

“But what infamous scoundrels these spies must be!” broke in George, with indignation. “What a base occupation! How I should like to meet one, and give him a bit of my mind—even if I stopped at that.”

“Yet plenty of people in all ranks of society are found to perform the office, degrading as it undoubtedly is. Some wit went so far as to divide Russian society into two classes only, ‘Spies and the spied.’ It was a bitter saying, but perhaps more true than the speaker imagined. You were asking what plea could be urged for Prince Soudakoff’s detention, had it been the wish of the Government that he should not leave the country. Well, I can furnish you with a very valid

reason ready made, without reference to secret police reports—a reason, you may rely on it, well known to the Third Section. ‘Why has he remitted nearly half a million to England?’ If they questioned him on that point what reply would he make?”

“Is that known?” asked George, in astonishment. “Why, I heard the Prince tell Mr. Bonham that even his wife was ignorant of the fact. How could it have escaped? You are mistaken, however, in the amount. It is little more than half the sum you mentioned.”

On propounding his question the Count had fixed a look upon the young man so keen that it seemed to eat into the depths of his soul, and, on eliciting the above answer, a flash, as of triumph, gleamed from his eyes, but of this circumstance George took no notice, remaining lost in wonder at the Prince’s having allowed so important a matter to become public property, as it must be from the fact of Ralowski knowing it. The latter, however, now remarked :

“What say you to a holiday to-night? I am half engaged to some fellow-countrymen of mine, and they will be delighted to see you. Let us take a cab into the City, and then we can do the rest on foot. You will not lose your lesson either,” he added, laughing,

“for there are sure to be some Russians present with whom you can talk. Come along.”

A hansom deposited them a little beyond Aldgate Pump, and, arm-in-arm, George and the Count struck eastward, soon becoming entangled in a labyrinth of alleys and courts, wholly unknown to the young man, but apparently familiar to his companion. At length they entered a gloomy passage, at the bottom of which a dim lamp hung over a door, at which Ralowski knocked twice, when the door flew open, apparently without any human agency, and re-closed in the same manner when they had entered. Total darkness now enveloped them, and had George been of a timid disposition he would have had ample excuse for feeling a little nervous; but no such idea entered his head; he fully trusted his friend, and the mysterious secrecy of the whole affair only amused him.

Ralowski led him forward several paces, and then came to a halt, when George heard the same knocking repeated, and, after a short pause, the second door flew open, and the new arrivals were bathed in a flood of brilliant light that prevented Donnington from seeing anything around him for some half a minute. He heard, however, a chorus of voices welcome his companion in what seemed to be every known European

language—Russian, German, French, and what George thought to be Spanish, together with some half-a-dozen others quite unknown to him; he also felt his hand seized and shaken with a vigour expressive of much cordiality. Bewildered, the young man suffered himself to be guided to a seat, and then had time to survey the strange scene presented to his view.

He found himself on a low, broad wooden bench that ran down the whole length of a large quadrangular room, the opposite side of which was furnished with a similar convenience, and on these were seated or lounging some thirty men, plainly but not shabbily dressed, and from their speech of many nationalities. A number of small round tables were securely fastened to the floor within easy reach of the benches, and on these the company placed the glasses with which each man was provided, but most of which George noticed contained nothing stronger than water. The centre of the room was quite clear, and at the end furthest from the door by which he had entered stood a small *daïs* or rostrum, raised a foot or so above the level of the floor. All the inmates of this mysterious apartment were smoking, and the confined air was heavy with tobacco; all were also talking at the same time, and the uproar thus occasioned was almost deafening.

“What place is this?” asked George of the Count, “and who is the person about to speak?” for a tall, soldier-like looking man had advanced to the rostrum, and knocked with a small hammer on the desk.

Immediately a dead silence reigned throughout the assembly—a silence almost awful in its solemnity after the hubbub that had preceded it.

“Hush!” whispered Ralowski, pressing the young man’s arm. “Hush! It is Prince L——”

George had heard of this man’s communistic views, and knew him to be regarded as a shining light by those of his own way of thinking, so felt much disappointed when the address was delivered in Polish, and he found himself unable to understand a single word. Many of his companions were evidently at a similar disadvantage, but all maintained the most perfect silence, and when the speaker’s compatriots broke forth into subdued applause the whole company, taking the cue from them, joined in. That the discourse visibly affected many of the audience was evident by the changing expressions that passed over their features. Now the speaker’s voice was raised to full pitch, when knitted brows and flashing eyes showed that his words had told home; again his tones fell almost to a whisper, and softened looks, moistened eyes, and in more than

one instance an audible sob, testified to his power of touching the hearts of his listeners.

The address lasted nearly an hour, and George saw that it wanted only twenty minutes to midnight when the orator descended from the rostrum. The Count observed him look at his watch and shouted—for the previous uproar had arisen with renewed violence—"I want to introduce you to one or two of my friends, then we will be off."

Bidding his companion to remain quiet, Ralowski left him for a short time, and then returned with two men, whom he introduced respectively as Messieurs Kurylowicz and Troianski. These gentlemen expressed the greatest pleasure at making his acquaintance, and evidently appeared anxious to imprint his features on their memories, for both scrutinised him with what George thought quite needless interest.

"I hope they will know me again," was the young man's inward reflection.

No fear on that score need trouble your mind, George Donnington. Those two men would pick you out of ten thousand at any time for the next twenty years to come.

On gaining the open the first question that the young man asked his companion was concerning the

nature of the meeting they had attended, and the character of the men taking part in it. "Why all that show of secrecy?" he concluded. "It seems absurd in a country like this; and, besides, can be of little use if every one can get in as easily as I did."

"You have hit the blot," said Ralowski, smiling; "the mystery in the affair is all a farce. Every detective in London knows of these meetings. Formerly one of them used to be present, but now the authorities have discontinued even that. Yet perhaps you will hardly credit me when I tell you that without this appearance of secrecy most of the people that you saw would refuse to attend the meetings. When the puppy has felt the lash it is only necessary to show the dog the whip. These men have been so long accustomed to burrow underground, have been so hunted and hounded by police-agents and gens-d'armes, that their whole existence would be robbed of its chief zest if you eliminated the mysterious element."

"But who or what are they? and what do they hope to accomplish by these meetings?" persisted the young man.

"Who and what they are would take a longer time to explain than we have to-night; but, briefly, they are men of every nation whom tyranny and oppression

have rendered desperate, and who wish to see their fellow-countrymen free. I am one of them. Your friend Prince Soudakoff is another."

"And who are the two gentlemen to whom you introduced me?"

"They are friends of mine who will gladly assist you in your studies if I am called away from England."

"There is no chance of that I trust—I mean, unless it be to your advantage," added George, who saw that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"A man circumstanced as I am can never tell what the morrow may bring forth; but here we are at the Minorities," and hailing a hansom both men got in.

When Count Ralowski reached his lodgings he showed no disposition to retire to rest. On the contrary, having first changed his coat for a comfortable dressing-gown, thrust his feet into slippers, and lighted a cigar, he sat down in an easy chair, stirred up the fire, and surrendered himself to what seemed very agreeable reflections, if his features afforded any clue to what was passing within. For at least an hour he sat thus, sunk in thought, and muttering occasionally such disjointed fragments as "credulous young idiot,"—"a nature to be moulded like wax"—"confiding fool"; then, when his second cigar had been reduced

to a stump, he rose, opened a despatch-box with the key hanging to his watch-chain, and commenced writing. We shall take the liberty of looking over his shoulder.

CHAPTER V.

A SECRET DESPATCH.

THE letter ran thus:—

“I have the honour to report to your Excellency that I am now in a position to satisfy you with regard to the delicate inquiries concerning Prince Soudakoff, with the conduct of which you were pleased to honour me. I report in full the manner in which the news herein contained reached me, in order that your Excellency may yourself judge of its value, and also see that I have not been idle during my stay in London.

“My first step was to make acquaintance with the German and French clerks in the employ of Bonham, the merchant. These young men, however, I soon

found could tell me nothing with which I was not already acquainted. I, however, keep up my intimacy with them, for in the service of the State small tools are often as valuable as larger ones, and it is never certain when their assistance will not be needed. They were not altogether useless to me—few people I venture to think are—for through them I ascertained that Bonham had no secrets from a young man whom he employs as a private secretary, and whom there seems reason to believe must be his son. This young man, by name Donnington, lodged, I found out, in Great Ormond Street. To get an introduction was my next object, and here fortune stepped in to my assistance.

“Discover who are a man’s friends and associates, how he employs his leisure hours, what are his tastes and general pursuits—discover these, and the agent who cannot then so shape his course as to bring about an acquaintance must be very unfit for the confidence with which your Excellency has been pleased to honour me.

“The people whom I detailed to watch young Donnington’s movements took me most agreeably by surprise by reporting that he was in the habit of visiting many of the cafés and restaurants resorted to

by men of communistic and revolutionary tendencies, in company with a fellow-lodger, one Frederick Coventry. The moment I heard this man's name I remembered meeting him in Paris, where he was fond of frequenting workmen's clubs and talking occasional nonsense about liberty, fraternity, and the rights of the sovereign people. It was equally likely that he would recall me—my features at least, for my name having been assumed only within the last few months must of necessity be unknown to him. It is true that he had seen me only some half-dozen times, but the extradition of Stefan Palkowitch—your Excellency will remember—was contemporary with the cessation of my visits to the Paris Democratic Club, and I had reason to believe that the members were unjust enough to impute to me a share in that transaction. Had this suspicion reached the ears of Coventry it would have printed my features in his mind, and the revival of such an absurd rumour would have gone far not only to defeat my present object but would also have militated seriously against my future usefulness in this country. I explain this at length, in order that your Excellency may perceive that I left no opening for the destruction of my scheme by any agency that human foresight could guard against. Under these

circumstances I could only wait quietly until Coventry left the country, for I had ascertained that he never stayed long in any one place.

“I now reach that point in my story wherein, as I mentioned above, Fortune—a lady, whose advances every good agent should, as a rule, shun—came to my aid and singularly befriended me. I had several times met, at various democratic gatherings, a Frenchman named Alphonse Rouget, who was an old friend and ally of mine, occupying, indeed, the same distinguished rôle under his government that I hold under that of Russia. I was at a *café* one evening when Rouget entered, seated himself by me, and asked me if I could recommend any one of my countrymen as a teacher of the Russian language. ‘You will probably be able to think of some one,’ he said, ‘and I should be glad to show a kindness to an English friend of mine. One, too, whom you have probably met,’ he added.

“‘Who is it?’ I asked, more from the habit of allowing nothing to escape me than with any idea of the answer I was to receive.

“‘Frederick Coventry,’ said Rouget, “not a bad fellow for a *cochon anglais*.’

“‘He is rather old to go to school,” I remarked.

“‘Oh! he does not want instruction himself,’ laughed

my companion, amused at the notion of a great bearded giant like Coventry tackling the mysteries of the Chrestomathy. 'It is for a friend, that young fellow who always goes about with him. He doesn't require a professor, you know,' added Alphonse, 'only a man to read with him and correct his exercises. Surely you must know some one who would be glad to earn a few shillings.'

"This intelligence, as perhaps your Excellency may deign to imagine, filled me with a joy so great that I had much difficulty in preventing it from appearing on my face; however, schooling my voice to a tone of unconcern, I replied that doubtless I could put my hand on such a man, and had indeed already in my mind selected a suitable agent for the position. But Fortune had not tired of showering her blessings on me, for Rouget said, 'Well, be as quick as you can about it. I should like to tell Coventry that the matter is arranged before he leaves England; he is so fond of the lad.'

" 'When does he leave?' I asked, abruptly.

" 'In less than a fortnight.'

" 'Within a week I will have found you a man. Good-night,' and I hurried away to reflect at my leisure on

the extraordinary way in which my dearest hopes were fulfilling themselves.

“My way was now perfectly cleared, for with Coventry once out of England I could myself assume the situation of tutor to young Donnington. Rouget required a little management, for, like all those second-rate French agents, he suspects intrigue, or the gratification of personal interest, in the simplest act of good nature ; but by assuring him that I had no work on hand, that my evenings were dull, and that such an occupation would be a great amusement, I think I succeeded in turning his ferret-nose towards some other hole ; however that may be, I was introduced to George Donnington by Alphonse shortly after Coventry’s departure from England, and entered upon my duties as friend and tutor.

“Were such a weakness as human affection any part of my character I must confess to your Excellency that this young man would have awakened some such feeling in my breast. Happily, nature had spared me the possession of this vice—for I can call it by no less severe a term—and I was proof against a winning manner that would have conquered most men.

“For some time I carefully studied my pupil’s character, and soon discovered that the more ordinary

agencies of corruption would be useless in his case. A stubborn pride manifested itself in his every action, and, unless I am much mistaken, some inkling of his parentage has fostered this feeling. I tried the usual allurements of women and strong drink, but he proved cold to the blandishments of frailty, and no provocation could tempt him to excess. Meanwhile my agents kept a regular watch on Prince Soudakoff, who at least three times a week visited the merchant Bonham, and remained closeted with him for some time, usually in Donnington's presence.

"Now that I have succeeded in getting the better of this young man, I no longer care to conceal from myself that the quiet way in which he baffled one, who is, I think, a past-master in the art of extracting delicate information, both piqued and astonished me. I had found a foeman worthy of my steel, and yet one quite ignorant of his powers of fence. In vain I spread my most delicate little nets baited with subtlest flattery, the young man avoided them as though warned by some hidden instinct, and I may mention to your Excellency that my experience has taught me that those who are proof against all else frequently succumb to a skilful appeal supervening on the gratification of

their vanity. This is the weak point with most men—Donnington proved an exception.

“It was now apparent that I must resort to a method which I am always loath to employ, because, if unsuccessful, it often alarms and destroys at one blow the edifice of confidence built up by weeks of care and caution. In a word, the secret must be *surprised*.

“As your Excellency is aware the Prince’s antecedents are all known to me, his erection of mills and other kindred follies. I had reason to believe from his visits to Westminster (where many engineers reside), to the Agricultural Hall, and other places where machinery is to be found, that he contemplated another speculation of the kind, but I could not be sure, and so resolved to represent myself as a ruined capitalist, who had lost the bulk of his fortune in endeavouring to raise the condition of his dependants. This, I thought, would place me in the light of a philanthropist, and perhaps elicit something from my cautious pupil. An opportunity to put this attempt into execution arose this day, with the favourable result that I have now the honour to report. I felt my way gradually, enlarging on the nobility of a commercial career, and the good wrought by those following that pursuit. I then adroitly hinted that I had formerly built mills and advanced

money, and that but for exceptional circumstances the speculation would have paid, concluding with the remark that all innovators were not so fortunate.

“Now, I thought, if Prince Soudakoff has said anything to this young man of his failure in that line it will surely be forthcoming.

“It was. The hook was too skilfully concealed for the shyest fish to think of danger, and Donnington at once remarked that he knew a man who had signally failed in the same thing, a Russian landowner, whose ungrateful peasantry had burnt his mills, but who purposed building others.

“I at once sprang my first mine, stating confidently that the person in question was Prince Soudakoff, and my dupe—from this moment I term him such—admitted that it was so.

“Having caused the Prince’s name to be mentioned between us was in itself a great advance, but I had in addition verified my suspicion that he meditated the erection of fresh works, so I at once determined to follow up my vein of luck, and hastened to explain that he was well known as a philanthropist, now labouring under the displeasure of the Russian Government—implied in short that we were fellow-sufferers, and much more to the same effect.

“I feel sure your Excellency, as a profound judge of human nature, and an unwearied student of national characteristics, will excuse me if I here digress a little from the straight course of my narrative. I have carefully studied these English as a people, and I have no hesitation in stating that the key to the greatness they have attained is to be found in their *pride*. This feeling is deep-rooted in all classes, although, from their reserved character as a nation, a superficial observer might easily pass it by unnoticed. The pride I allude to is evidenced by the cool unconcern with which they regard the achievements of other countries. Mention some gigantic feat of engineering skill—say the piercing of the Mont Cenis Tunnel—in the presence of a mixed company of Englishmen, and you will hear no single remark indicative of envy, but rather a calm approval, which, rightly read, means that in the breast of each person is enthroned an unalterable conviction that, not only could his own countrymen have done the same thing, but that they would have executed it in a more expeditious fashion and at considerably less cost. This pride must by no means be confounded with vanity. The English are no more exempted from this weakness than any other nation, but pride holds it down, prevents it from cropping up to the surface,

in many cases keeps it in such concealment that its very existence remains unsuspected. Remark the difference between these islanders and their nearest neighbours. Unless a Frenchman, or his nation, has some share in a work—no matter of what nature—that work, however successful its issue, is not a thing to be praised, but, on the contrary, to be declaimed against and decried at every opportunity. This is pure vanity, a shallow passion unleavened by the admixture of just pride which gives it nobility; and, moreover, a foolish passion, for it draws down contempt and ridicule upon its possessors. Yes, pride is the key-note to the English national character, and it behoves all those having dealings with them to keep this fact constantly before their eyes.

“If it should be wished to draw this feeling to the surface at short notice it is easily done by the mention of a subject, which is to every Englishman as a red rag waved before a bull. I allude to those intimate and paternal functions exercised by our own and some other Continental Governments for the better regulation of the relations existing between them and their subjects. To such wise and tender supervision these islanders have a deep-rooted repugnance, calling its exercise ‘despotism,’ and its agents ‘spies’—a word

conveying a most disagreeable meaning in their language. Knowing this I turned the conversation on the system of espionage, and gained my object, for the young man inveighed bitterly against its agents.

“With every detail of what followed it is unnecessary for me to trouble you. Having expressed my wonder that the Government had permitted Prince Soudakoff to leave his country, Donnington inquired with much indignation on what plea so well-intentioned a man could have been detained, and this gave me the opportunity for springing my second mine, and venturing all upon the method mentioned above—*surprise*. Returning to the system of espionage, I mentioned several matters that I knew would interest my listener, and then suddenly reverting to Prince Soudakoff I asked, ‘What answer he would make to his Government if questioned concerning the half-million of money he had remitted to England?’

“The bolt was now shot—would it reach its mark? It was, as your Excellency may imagine, a trying moment for me. I disliked the coarseness of the method I had adopted; it wanted all the refinement and finesse by which I usually attain my ends; but, as the result will show, it answered its purpose. The young man’s face

wore a look of the most perfect astonishment as he replied—I give you this word for word—‘Is this known? I heard the Prince tell Mr. Bonham that even his wife was ignorant of the fact. How could it have leaked out? In the amount, however, you are wrong, for it is little more than half that sum.’

“Thus your Excellency will see that I may take credit to myself for extracting the secret that baffled our best men at home, for I cannot for one moment think that Donnington’s admission is other than the exact truth. I know my pupil’s nature too well to be mistaken, and I hold him to be one of those singularly constituted people who would not resort to a subterfuge even for their own advantage. Such singleness of mind is surely an anomaly in the nineteenth century.

“Yes; your Excellency may rely upon the truth of this information; which I think so important that I pen and post this despatch before retiring to rest. Prince Soudakoff has assuredly remitted a large sum to England, and I have reason to believe that it lies securely invested in the English Funds. It has cost much time, trouble, and money to clear this matter up, and with its elucidation the instructions with which you furnished me are carried out, and I await your further orders with the fullest confidence of your

approval. I shall, of course, maintain a watch on the Prince until I hear from you, and shall continue my intercourse with the young man, for who can tell what an adroit question may elicit? or at what moment the occasion for propounding it may not occur?

“Foreseeing that perhaps my presence may be needed by you at home I paved the way for that contingency by taking Donnington this evening—immediately after he had betrayed himself—to a socialist gathering in the east of London, where I introduced him to Kurylowicz and Troianski, who are both good men, although I may venture to doubt whether they would have brought this affair to so successful an issue as

“Your Excellency’s most humble and obedient servant,
“MATHIAS SCHIMKOW, otherwise COUNT RALOWSKI.”

Having finished this precious document, the spy carefully read it through, smiled approvingly, and then, after putting on his coat, went cautiously out to post it. It so happened that the lodger on the ground-floor had been attending a convivial meeting that evening, and, returning home somewhat overpowered by the good cheer of which he had partaken, had flung himself on his bed without undressing, a ceremony he proposed performing after the restorative of a short nap. The Count’s descent, cautious though it was,

had awakened this gentleman, in whose confused mind visions of burglars immediately arose. However, on hearing the front door close he forgot the whole circumstance, and was slowly undressing in the dark when again the door opened and shut, and now a stealthy footstep was audible in the passage.

The ground-floor lodger was a sailor, and as such a man of action, so, governed by the first impulse that crossed his bewildered brain, he rushed out, struck full against the spy, and forthwith landed that ingenuous nobleman a blow in the eye and another on the chest, which brought him heavily to ground, and both men were found struggling and swearing on the floor when the noise of the disturbance brought other inmates on the scene.

The Count could not quit his room for nearly a fortnight, not, indeed, until a telegram from the chief of his department arrived with orders to return to Russia, which he forthwith did, without visiting Great Ormond Street again ; without, indeed, wishing George adieu, for the latter was ignorant of where his Polish friend lived, and, though astonished at his long absence, was unable to assign any cause for it. A letter from Ralowski, however, at length reached him—gentlemen of the Count's kidney are always very punctilious, and

never make an enemy if possible—dated from Paris, to which city, he said, important business had suddenly called him. It terminated with expressions of regret at so abrupt a severance from one whom he had learned to honour and esteem, and inclosed an address which would find Messieurs Kurylowicz and Troianski, should George ever need assistance in his Russian studies. Last came a fervent hope that fate would permit them to meet again “in happier times, when my beloved and bleeding country shall be free and I can receive you at my own hall-door as befits a Sarmatian nobleman.”

This effusive epistle bore a coronet and cypher, and was in all respects quite *comme il faut*. George thought of its concluding passage when in due course the Sarmatian noble's hall-door *was* opened to receive him, and he became a well-guarded, if not an honoured, guest in the mansion. . . . But we must not forstall.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY RANDAL.

RALOWSKI's sudden departure was a great blow to George Donnington, for he had not only made considerable progress in Russian under that gentleman's tutelage, but had, moreover, conceived a strong liking for the man and his ways. For some evenings he struggled on with his books, but finding this very slow work he wrote to M. Kurylowicz, inclosing the Count's note, reminding him of their meeting in Whitechapel, and begging the favour of a visit. The Russian answered the appeal at once and came, accompanied by his friend Troianski, and both men became almost nightly visitors in Great Ormond Street. George found them well-informed and shrewd, but of far

inferior mental calibre to Ralowski, while their habits were less refined. The young man had hinted at remuneration for their services, but this both had steadily refused; they, however, showed no scruple in helping themselves to his cigars and claret; and, under the plea that hearing general conversation would improve their pupil more than bookwork, they introduced sundry games of chance, beginning with Polish backgammon and gradually passing on to cards. At first Donnington was merely a spectator, but he was easily persuaded to take a hand at *ecarté*—indeed, in his position as host refusal would have been uncourteous—and the habit once commenced continued. The stakes were very inconsiderable, the chat instructive, and, if the young man rose a loser, he regarded the money well expended, and was rather inclined to think his tutors had adopted this method of paying themselves to save him from all embarrassment.

Meanwhile the months were slowly slipping away, summer had returned again, and George was meditating another visit to Wakefield. Eva was now in her nineteenth year, and had already become mistress of all the knowledge it was within the power of the Misses Quilter to impart, so it had been determined that she should go forth and fight her own way in the

world as a governess, when a situation suitable for her could be found. George had indeed combated this resolve, wishing her to come to town and take charge of the limited establishment he could set up; but the girl, in her way, was quite as independent as her brother, and would hear of no such arrangement. She declared that having received a good education for the purpose of supporting herself she should decline being any longer an incumbrance upon any one. Moreover, she had quite money sufficient to provide for her wants and to supply all necessities, leaving a considerable nest-egg in hand for any unforeseen contingency.

Every Christmas Eve, during her stay at Throstle House, had brought the girl an envelope containing a bank-note for fifty pounds. No letter accompanied the gift; the address was written in a clerkly hand, and the postmark, London. Who sent it she was wholly unable to divine. George's resources were too limited to suppose that he could afford so handsome a present. Andrew Bonham, when taxed with the surreptitious kindness, replied, somewhat roughly, that he had "no fifty-pound notes to throw way on girl's dresses and fal-lals;" and there the matter stood. At Wakefield her every want was forestalled by the watchful Misses

Quilter, so this yearly tribute had been carefully put away for a rainy day.

George was at his post in Mr. Bonham's room, engaged in his usual occupation of answering confidential letters, when an exclamation from the merchant called his attention. "Donnington," he said, in a vexed voice, "here is a letter from Prince Soudakoff, giving me an account of his new schemes at Tiraspol. He is as sanguine as usual, but he seems to think that the authorities regard him with more suspicion than ever since his return, and attributes this to their discovering that he has remitted large sums to England. I will just read what he says about it. 'How my secret can have escaped I know not, but that my enemies have discovered it remains beyond a doubt. The indirect hints conveyed to me from time to time assure me of this unfortunate fact. However, the money was my own, so little real harm is done, except that it is provoking to find the world in possession of a transaction that I had concealed even from my wife. Except to ourselves and young Donnington I imagined the matter totally unknown. This only shows how clever our good Government is at worming out a secret. Speaking of Donnington makes me say that I wish your agent here was a man of the same stamp. I have not the

slightest fault to find with Mr. Bonsfield, remember. His business capacity is undeniable, but with this excellent quality the rôle of his merits ends. A house like yours wants in its representative a man capable of taking his part in society when office-hours are over; one who can make friends socially, and be seen where our best people congregate. This is a hint, my dear Bonham, that I know you will not take amiss from so old a friend.'

"The conclusion is rubbish," continued Mr. Bonham. "I want a representative who can foresee a rise in tallow, or a good forthcoming crop of hemp, before any of his fellows, not a dandy who will neglect business to carry about the Princess's lapdog. But that his secret should have escaped annoys me, George, more than I can tell you. Surely nothing can have tempted you to mention it?"

This remark brought no pricks of conscience to the young man, for he had not the slightest idea that the secret had been wrung from him. He therefore replied with unconcern, "That Prince Soudakoff had remitted money here was known to the only man by whom I ever heard his name uttered. This man—Count Ralowski, a friend of mine—told me that he had done

so, and I remember being surprised at his knowing a fact I thought so carefully concealed."

"Who is Ralowski?" asked Bonham. "I don't remember the name. Let me look;" and taking down a book he commenced turning over the leaves. "What is he, a Pole? He is not amongst the Russian nobility."

"Yes, a Pole, and an exile at present."

"Very probably a police-agent, or, to put it in plain words, a spy," remarked the merchant, coolly.

This sounded so vile an imputation, and so alien to the man's whole character, that George took up the cudgels warmly in defence of his absent friend, concluding by remarking that he had left England now, and that he should never, in all probability, see him again.

"You make a staunch advocate for your friends," said Andrew, with an amused smile, "but, trust me, it is well to know men thoroughly before admitting them to that title. However, I see nothing that tells against the Count. Soudakoff must have let the secret drop himself in some way or other."

And so the matter ended; but none the less Bonham thought a good deal of the advice with which the Prince had closed his letter. To push the house in

Southern Russia was an object very dear to him, and he saw that the present manager—a blunt John Bull—was hardly fitted to do this. Young Donnington, he reflected, with his gentlemanly manner and knowledge of languages, would suit the post exactly.

Thinking of his ward brought another matter to his mind, and, turning towards him, he said, “Do you know that your aunt, Lady Randal, is in town, George? You ought certainly to call upon her. She is staying at ——’s Hotel in Albemarle Street.”

“Would my father have liked me to do so?” asked the young man.

“Of that I am no judge,” replied Mr. Bonham, curtly. “You are grown up, and able to decide for yourself. Were I to advise you, I should say go. She is your near relation, and there ought to be as few quarrels as possible in a family.”

“I have no objection in the world to seeing my aunt,” remarked Donnington, “but I cannot bear the thought of meeting her husband.”

“The last place you are likely to find him will be in his wife’s company, if all reports are true,” said the merchant, grimly. “Dismiss all fears on that score.”

On the following Sunday afternoon George presented himself in Albemarle Street, sent in his card, and was

immediately shown upstairs. He had followed closely on the steps of the servant who took in his name, and fancied that he heard a man's querulous tones during the short space that the door stood open.

"That must be Sir Edward," he thought, "and old Bonham is wrong about his flying his wife's society. I wish sincerely he had been elsewhere just now. How the door bangs! Perhaps he has quitted the room in a rage on hearing my name. Old brute!" but here the servant invited him to enter, and he found himself for the first time in the presence of his father's only sister.

What strangely mistaken notions we usually form of the character and appearance of those whom we have often heard of and thought about, but have never seen. Photography has, it is true, assisted us a little, but, after all, not much. A police-officer may form a very good idea of a suspected criminal's features from a sun-picture, but it is certain that he could tell you little of the man's true nature, whether he was naturally light-hearted, or habitually wore the ferocious cast of countenance that the likeness is sure to possess. For the ordinary individual, however, who looks to the camera for something deeper than the mere outward similitude, there remains nothing but disappointment. Expressive

blue eyes become as those of a boiled cod, while melting orbs of darker hue stare fixedly at the beholder with meretricious boldness ; in short, the result is a travesty, and the mental diagnosis formed usually wrong.

George found it so in this case. He had seen more than one likeness of his aunt, and had pictured to himself a tall Juno-like woman, able to hold her own even with her husband, but chilling and forbidding to all her surroundings. He now saw that the lady who advanced swiftly, held him for a moment by both shoulders whilst she peered into his face, and then kissed him lovingly on the forehead, was tall indeed, but endowed with a grace that made every movement seem the poetry of motion. Seldom had he seen features more loveable, or that showed more plainly the remains of early beauty. A gentle and melancholy expression habitually pervaded the countenance, but there were times when, as at present, the whole face was lighted up with pleasure, then "the pale cast of thought" vanished, leaving behind it only the benign and beautiful.

"So it has come at last," she murmured, leading the young man to the window that she might study his every feature. "You are the little George whose likeness I have in a long frock reposing in his nurse's arms. And how like poor Ralph at your age!" and so on, until

she had feasted her eyes upon the newly-found nephew to her heart's content, when she led him to the sofa, and the whole hour occupied by his visit was spent in eager questionings on her side and frank replies on his.

He had much difficulty in avoiding the pressing invitation to dinner, and not until he had promised to return on the following Sunday would she let him escape; then at last, with her parting kiss warm upon his brow, he gained the street and found time to collect his scattered thoughts.

So this was the woman—his nearest relation, too, except Eva—whom for the last three years he had steadily avoided! A woman who was brimming over with suppressed affection, and only wanted an object on which to lavish it! How churlish his conduct now appeared, how unfeeling—unnatural—nay, wicked! What an interest she took in Eva, too. Why, she had plied him with questions about her that he was wholly unable to answer. Surely with such an aunt, able and willing to receive, shelter, and mother her, it would be wrong in the girl to persist in her determination to go out. Under Lady Randal's protection she would meet those in her own station in life, would marry well, and so escape the hardships which were as nothing to him, a man, but which would prove terrible to a delicate girl

however high-minded and courageous. Then the thought of Sir Edward intruded itself like a black cloud on the bright canvas of his day-dream, and obscured all its rosy hues. But perhaps, after all, he was as much mistaken in the man as he had been in his wife. Time would prove this, for he must meet him now; meanwhile he was heartily glad to have made his aunt's acquaintance, and reached Great Ormond Street in a very contented frame of mind.

Andrew Bonham listened with great attention to George's description of his visit; but the young man noticed that he dropped no single word that could be construed into an inquiry concerning Lady Randal, though it evidently pleased him greatly to hear the warmth with which she was mentioned by her nephew, and he wore a more subdued air than usual after the conversation.

Ah! those old memories of the past, how fast they cleave! Strive as we may, nor time nor will can wholly deaden or destroy them!

George had, in his conversation with his aunt, given her plainly to perceive that he shrank from associating with her husband; but during the course of the week a note from her arrived, begging him to dine with them on the following day, and concluding with an expression

of the pleasure it would afford her to make Sir Edward and her nephew acquainted. "You will make me very happy if you come, George," she said. It was a small matter in which to oblige her, after all, and he went.

However great the personal attractions of Edward Randal may have been at the time when he wooed and won Emily Donnington, they had now entirely passed away. Ill-health, brought on by early irregularities, had shrunk his limbs and bowed his once tall frame, while an air of peevish discontent, habitually worn, had stamped its impress on every feature. He had evidently schooled himself to meet his young guest with politeness, if not cordiality, but the man was too innately selfish and forgetful of the feelings of others to keep the farce up throughout the entire evening. Besides, George bore a striking likeness to his father, whom Randal had hated with all the hatred of which his nature was capable; not that Sir Ralph had ever done him any real harm beyond throwing every obstacle in the way of his marriage, but because he had found out Sir Edward's contemptible nature, and flatly refused to be associated with him, even after he had become his brother-in-law. Although nearly four years had passed since the hand of death had been laid so suddenly on his foe, the feelings of Sir Edward had undergone no

change, and the thought that his kinsman had died in debt, leaving a family in destitution, was in truth agreeable to him, although he concealed all outward expression of pleasure even from his wife. When the news of the catastrophe reached Lady Randal she had, as we know, offered the orphans a home; but few could guess the trouble she had undergone, the entreaties to which she had condescended, to extort from her husband permission to do what was, after all, only a manifest duty. Not that the baronet ever meant really to refuse—he had too much respect for the world’s opinion to do that—but his jaundiced nature liked to make the asking of a favour by his wife as bitter as possible, and to render the granting of the same, to the woman whom he secretly feared, as ungracious as his currish spirit told him it was safe to venture. It was with difficulty that he had consented to George’s being asked to dinner, and, now that the wine was on the table and Lady Randal withdrawn, he entered upon a series of inquiries the nature of which he knew were likely to wound the young man’s pride.

“No chance, I fear, from what my wife tells me, of your getting back to Warham, Donnington? Ah! your poor father was rash—much too rash. He would never listen to me: otherwise I could have told him that

the — Bank was unstable. One of the greatest swindles out. I knew C——, one of the directors, a scoundrel who richly deserved the halter. Every far-thing went, did it not?"

Poor George reddened, but replied quietly that it was so.

"What a change you and your sister must have found it!" continued Sir Edward, delighted to see that his first shaft had struck home. "She from all accounts has found a comfortable home in Yorkshire; but for you to miss Oxford and be relegated to a desk in the office of a fellow like Bonham! 'Pon my soul, too bad!"

"Yes, it was not pleasant," replied George, with outward cheerfulness, although inwardly he was boiling over with indignation. "But my position is materially bettered by the kindness and consideration of Mr. Bonham."

"Indeed!" said the baronet, with a scarcely-suppressed sneer; "I knew that he loved to pose as a philanthropist—likes seeing his name in the papers, and that sort of thing, you know—but I thought he rigidly exacted his pound of flesh from those in his employ."

"Then you have been misinformed, Sir Edward,"

cried George, exasperated beyond endurance. "There lives no kinder man in London than Mr. Bonham, or one more considerate to his *employés*."

"Don't take it so seriously," replied the baronet, who saw that his victim would turn if tortured further, and rob him of the satisfaction procured by seeing his barbed speeches rankle. "I only repeat what people say—very likely it is a pack of lies. One should believe nothing nowadays. No more wine? Then let us have our coffee in the drawing-room."

"Now, could that man have made such cruel speeches with the fixed purpose of wounding me? or was it unintentional on his part?" was George's thought as he lay awake that night pondering over the conversation between his uncle and himself. "If I could be sure that he meant ill, by Heaven! I would never set foot across his threshold again."

George might have spared himself all reflections, for inexorable destiny had already determined that he and Sir Edward were never again to meet.

"Have you much on hand this morning?" asked Andrew Bonham, on entering his room, where George was opening and answering letters, "for I have a matter of great importance to tell you."

"No, sir—nothing that will not keep—" answered

the young man, wondering what was coming. "There is a letter from Bodogatsky about the iron-mines in the Ural."

"Hang Bodogatsky!" broke in the merchant, petulantly; "the fellow wants more money, of course—let him wait. Now, look here, George, what I have got to say will occupy only a few minutes, but I shall require you to consider it for a full week before giving me an answer. You speak French and German?"

"Yes."

"And Russian?"

"Not fluently. I require practice."

"If I put you in charge of the house at Odessa do you feel yourself capable of managing it? That is the question I wish you to weigh thoroughly in your mind. I should keep Bousfield—a very excellent fellow—there for six months to teach you the business, after which it will remain entirely in your hands. Now, run down to Wakefield and see your sister—bid her a long good-bye if you decide to accept—and be here, in this room, on Wednesday next, with your answer. Now be off, for I am busy;" and the astonished George was pushed unceremoniously out of the door, crumpling up in a helpless bewildered way a bank-note that the merchant had thrust into his hand.

CHAPTER VII.

A GAME AT "NAP."

EARLY autumn, or late summer, the latter half of July, and the Misses Quilter had not yet dismissed their petticoated flock for the vacation. This made no difference, however, to Eva, who had completed her education, and now did little beyond playing at assisting those worthy maidens ; so she and George again went for a week to the farmhouse they had visited before, and beguiled the way thither with a few sandwiches from the basketful provided by Miss Dolly, the remainder of which made an excellent supper for the guard of the train and his numerous family. The Yore trout were not forgotten ; but George never extended his ramble beyond his sister's walking powers,

for they would, in all probability, be separated for years, and they wished to spend every moment of the time together.

Long and earnestly George had thought of the merchant's brilliant offer; had turned it over and over in his mind, and viewed it in every aspect that could be conjured up by his own imagination, or the far more fanciful flights of Eva. A lad of three-and-twenty is not a pocket edition of all the philosophies, and, perhaps, the young man formed too high an estimate of his own powers; but he did his best to weigh the matter dispassionately, and with a due regard to his employer's interests, and the conclusion he arrived at was, that after six months under the present manager he would be perfectly capable of conducting the business in a way that would satisfy his principal, whilst every succeeding year would add to his experience and ripen his judgment.

Eva's vivid imagination soared at once into an enchanted realm of her own creation. Notwithstanding the more prosaic details to be found in the geographical compendiums which she had studied under the Quilter rule, Odessa was, in her mind, an oriental city of great luxury and magnificence—a sort of Black Sea Bagdad, and she pictured her brother as a second Haroun

Alraschid, exploring its mysteries and catching glimpses of languishing black orbs peeping shyly through latticed casements. Such vulgar ideas as stately wharves, crowded with the shipping of many nations; of shoots pouring tons of yellow grain into the holds; of huge casks of tallow, piles of fir-timber, and bales of hemp; of the noise and hustle of a great emporium;—all such common commercial notions she thrust carefully aside as mere secondary considerations.

"I shall always love that dear guardian of ours now," she babbled, and the rippling stream beside which the brother and sister strolled was less pleasant to listen to: "We thought him harsh enough at first, but it is easy to see the character was assumed and does not suit him one bit. And oh, George, I am sure that I know who sends me my present every Christmas; it is Aunt Emily. I feel certain of it, for Miss Tilly Quilter—tell-tale 'Tilda, the girls call her—dropped something that showed Aunt Emily was interesting herself in getting me a good place. She tried to put a different construction on her words afterwards, but she cannot deceive me," and the girl looked wondrous wise.

"I wish, my love," said George, passing his arm affectionately round her waist, "that you would give up all idea of governess work. There is not the slightest

necessity for it. I do not yet know what my salary will amount to, but as the position is one of great responsibility it is sure to be good, and if the brother is to be an oriental magnate—a caliph—I am sure his only sister should not waste her youth and beauty in driving Lindley Murray and Goldsmith into the thick heads of a parcel of stupid children. Let me write to Aunt Emily and say that you give it up.”

Whilst he was speaking the girl’s face had grown grave, and a look of fixed determination—how much she resembled George at that moment!—was visible on every feature. For an instant she was silent, then, laying her hand lightly on her brother’s arm, she said—

“Surely, dear, we have settled this already, and recurring to it does no good. I have determined to gain my own livelihood, and nothing but your direct command shall prevent my striving to do so. That you will not forbid my doing what I feel to be right—what our father would have wished me to do—I feel certain. If you have more money than you know what to do with, save it. You will want every penny to redeem Warham, and then, George dear, the Princess!”

“Devil take her! I want no foreigner; give me a modest English maiden when I marry. But, Eva dear,

why should you not come out and keep house for me? I am sure Bonham would raise no objections."

"Perhaps not," returned the girl, "but I have to be consulted; and I do not choose to hamper my brother by giving him a young woman to look after, who might grow jealous every time he glanced at a pretty face, thinking that its owner would usurp her place in his affections. No, George darling, you go your way and I will go mine. Our love will not lessen because we are separated; distance and time will only increase it with me," and she kissed him affectionately.

"Well, well," said the young man, partially mollified by the caress, "you must have your own way, I suppose; but promise me one thing. Promise, that if you are ever unhappy—if you ever feel the slightest regret at continuing in the path you have wilfully chalked out for yourself—in short, if you take a wiser view of things when the stern reality of every-day drudgery has disinvested it of the romantic halo your glowing imagination has thrown around it—when, in fact, you come to your senses—promise solemnly that then, without an hour's hesitation, you will go to Aunt Emily, or Andrew Bonham, until I can be communicated with."

"And if I give a solemn promise to that effect you

will not dissuade me any more from following out my plan?"

"I will not, much as I regret and dislike it."

"Then I now give a sacred promise that it shall be so, and here is a kiss to seal it."

"A letter from Miss Quilter!" cried Eva, on entering the farm-house, and taking an envelope off the table. "What can the dear old trot have to say? They may talk of the watchfulness of a shepherd's dog, but commend me to those dear, though venerable and antiquated, ladies for keeping their flock in sight. Why, George, my dear, what do you think has happened? Just fancy, I have got a place!" and somehow her brother thought he detected a shade of discontent in the triumphant tone with which she sought to impart the intelligence. "I will read you the letter."

"Dear Miss Donnington"—(formal old cat! why doesn't she say Eva, as "Tilda or Dolly would?)"—"You will, I feel sure, be delighted to hear that an opening has at length presented itself for the exercise of the educational talent that you undoubtedly possess, and which it has been the constant object of myself and my sisters to improve, in order that you may take an honourable place in the ranks of a class whose power

for good or evil is very great, although their claims to consideration and gratitude are too often overlooked" —(Encouraging view she takes of tuition, eh, George?) —"By this morning's post I have received a letter from Mrs. Mansfield, who manages the establishment of the Earl of Haslemere, asking if you are willing to undertake the education of the Ladies Maud and Alice St. John, aged respectively thirteen and eleven years, and described as docile, loveable children. ('Little brats!' broke in George.) Mrs. Mansfield does not mention the source from which she heard of you, but some friend has evidently been working in your behalf, for she manifests great anxiety to secure your services. ('Very kind of her, I'm sure,' said George.) The greater part of the year you will spend at Holmewood in Sussex, the remainder either in London or the Continent. The duties will be light, while you will be regarded entirely as one of the family, and the salary is most unusually liberal, especially for a novice in the art of tuition, 100*l.* per annum. ('Amazing generosity! cried George, 'Reckless prodigality!') As your present arrangements include your return to-morrow I shall merely acknowledge the receipt of Mrs. Mansfield's letter to-day and say that you will write yourself later on. I consider that you are very fortunate. Few

young women have so brilliant a prospect in their career. I remain," &c. &c.

"Oh! here is a postscript: 'Your pupils are the half-sisters of the present peer, who is just now out of England.'"

"Well, George, why don't you congratulate me at once, instead of sneering at poor old Miss Quilter's stilted jargon. The prospect seems delightful, does it not? So much better to be with gentlefolks than with cotton-spinners or rich tradesmen."

"Or people engaged in mercantile pursuits, like myself," added the young man half bitterly. "St. John—St. John—and Holmewood," he continued, "the names seem familiar to me somehow. Ah! now I remember this man Haslemere was at Eton with me for one term; I came just before he left for Oxford. A good-looking fellow, as far as I can recollect,—captain of the school eleven, and great on the water. He made me fag for him sometimes: he was Lord Petworth then."

"By-the-bye," he said when they met at breakfast on the following, their last, morning in the dales, "I have little doubt now, Eva, to whom you are indebted for this place. I was cudgeling my brains last night, and the whole business became clear to me at last. It

suddenly struck me that Petworth had once taken my part, saying that he was a connection, or knew my people, or something of the sort. Then it flashed across me that his mother was Sir Edward Randal's sister, so you see there is a kind of remote link, which I should be delighted to see broken," he said savagely as the remembrance of his uncle's cutting words recurred to him. "Yes," he continued, "you may be sure that Aunt Emily persuaded her husband to recommend you. I cannot help wishing it had come through any other channel."

"I think it was most kind," said the girl undauntedly, "and I feel very grateful to her. Of course if I ever meet Lord Haslemere I am not to mention that you knew him at Eton?"

"Assuredly not. He is not the least likely to remember a little fellow such as I was, and you forget that even my very name was different—I was Percival then."

"And will be again, my darling George, before many years are past. But I must see to the packing."

That afternoon George took his sister back to Wakefield, and was present at the little council of war assembled to decide on what answer she should give to Mrs. Mansfield. All the girl's natural intrepidity prompted

her to accept the situation. George, faithful to his promise by the brook, threw no obstacle in the way. The Misses Quilter were in the seventh heaven at one of their pupils being selected to fill so honourable a position. All seemed to smile on the future of the young governess, who at once sat down, wrote to accept Mrs. Mansfield's offer, and herself placed the letter in the box with much ceremony.

"It is like firing the funeral pyre with one's own hand," she remarked, smiling. "The deed is done—it is irrevocable."

A few hours later the brother and sister parted, George reminding her of her promise, and the girl repeating her determination to adhere to it faithfully—in the spirit as well as in the letter. Though each professed the greatest confidence in the future, both were sad, for the young man was bound to a distant land, and Eva was entering upon duties entirely new to her. When should they meet again and under what circumstances? That we are unable to answer such questions is one of the blessings granted by divine wisdom to frail humanity. If possible, how often with the cheering star of hope set for ever in the dark future the response would reveal.

At precisely the stated hour Andrew Bonham entered

his room, and, as he expected, found George awaiting him.

"Well, what decision have you come to?" he cried, even before taking off his hat and gloves." "Is it to be eastward ho! or not?"

"It is," replied the young man, his voice faltering a little as he recognised all the responsibility conveyed in the two monosyllables.

"That is as I should have wished. When shall you be ready to start?"

"To-night!" was the laconic answer.

"Such a reply speaks well for your zeal," returned the merchant, smiling, "but there is no such violent hurry as all that. You are not a Clyde hurrying off to stamp out an Indian mutiny. Suppose we say in a week or ten days' time. Meanwhile you had better see to your outfit. Draw on me for what money you want, and do not be afraid of overdoing it. I wish you to be comfortable. You had better take a gun and a revolver. Of course your attendance here is at an end, but look in whenever you find time, and let me know when you are ready to start. Now be off, for I am busy."

This, be it observed, was the merchant's invariable formula when, after some act of kindness, he wished to escape the thanks it was sure to bring forth.

Some dozen or fifteen men were assembled in George Donnington's room in Great Ormond Street, smoking and chatting, whilst Mrs. Klipper and her handmaiden Sarah were clearing the table, for this was the young man's last night in London, and he had asked his friends and old colleagues to a farewell supper. The worthy landlady had been terribly disconcerted at her best lodger leaving, but Mr. Bonham, recognising the use of a secretary, had promoted one of the most intelligent young men in his employ to that position, who had expressed his willingness to take George's rooms; so the heart of Mrs. Klipper waxed joyful once more, and she beamed upon the company with a natural benignity somewhat heightened by strong waters, and would have broken forth into a harangue, highly laudatory of the new Odessa manager, if Mr. Nugget had not taken her by the shoulders and gently but irresistibly thrust her into the passage.

George, as we know, had not many friends, or even acquaintances, in London; but the few men with whom he had been brought into contact were now met together at his bidding. Mr. Mildmay, the manager, had declined to be present, but had made George dine with him at his club. Mr. Nugget, who was club-less, accepted the invitation, in direct contravention of his better half's

positive orders. That estimable spouse had taken it into her head that there would be ladies present—designing minxes bent on captivating the heart of her adored Rufus, and ruining her domestic bliss for ever; so she put a stern veto on the cashier's going, but it was in vain: Mr. Nugget was there in all the glory of a black satin waistcoat; and, on the principle that it was as well to be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, he appeared determined to enjoy his evening to the utmost, and see the fun out, oblivious of the reproaches that would cover him as he slipped in with the morning milk. Both the Russians were there, and although strangers to the other guests they seemed perfectly at home and made themselves very agreeable; the remainder consisted of young men in Bonham's employ, amongst them Stephens, who had succeeded Donnington as secretary.

"Now, gentlemen," cried George, when Sarah had deposited a tray on the table on which were bottles, lemons, and the other ingredients for punch, "what shall it be: cards, or singing, or what? There is nobody in the house to disturb, so you may give your voices full play. Suppose you set us the example Mr. Nugget; I feel sure you can sing, although I have never yet had the pleasure of hearing you."

Now if there was one thing more than another of

which the cashier had a nervous horror it was singing. Possessing an organ compared with which the rush of steam through a safety-valve was melody, and wholly unendowed with either ear or taste for music, he dreaded a call of this nature beyond measure, so he immediately availed himself of the escape afforded him by the host, and declared vehemently in favour of cards. "Let us have a good rubber of whist first, or a round game, then we can think about singing later on."

"Yes, yes, a round game!" cried Stephens. "Bring out the cards, Donnington, like a good fellow."

"Be it so," assented George. "But remember there must be no high play: is that agreed?"

"Out with the pasteboards, old fellow, and don't preach," broke in Stephens, clapping his host on the back. "Reserve that for the poor devils at Odessa—we can do without it here."

George saw that the young man was excited, both by wine and by his new position, and at once proceeded to gratify his wish, fearing otherwise to mar the harmony of the meeting.

"Very well. Clear away the glasses and have the round game at the centre table. Troianski, turn down the card-table; it will do for the rubber. Which are you for, Mr. Nugget?"

That gentleman elected in favour of whist, to which he and three of the elder men sat down; whilst the remainder, amongst whom were the two Russians and George, commenced Vingt-et-un, with the highest stake limited to half-a-crown.

For more than an hour this went on, the younger members of the party becoming more and more excited as the chances of the game varied and fickle Fortune smiled or frowned. No great damage had been done to any one's pocket as yet, but the largest loser was certainly Kurylowicz, who viewed his silver melting away with national imperturbability; next to him, as regards ill-luck, stood Stephens.

"Oh! hang it all!" cried the latter, draining his glass as he saw his last shilling disappear, "this is slow work. Fortune is dead set against me to-night, at least in this miserable game. What say you, gentlemen, to a little 'Nap'? Perhaps I shall have better luck then."

The proposal was hailed with delight, as promising more excitement, by two of the speaker's brother-clerks; but George and three other men got up and quitted the table, declaring they had lost enough for one evening. The Russians sat on, apparently indif-

ferent as to the nature of the game as long as it was one of chance.

George busied himself in looking to the wants of his guests, and watched with some interest the fluctuations of the new game. Certainly it seemed as though the words of young Stephens were prophetic; for he held excellent cards, and had soon not only recouped himself for his former losses but had won a considerable sum to boot, for the stakes were no longer retained within their earlier moderate dimensions. Gold had now taken the place of silver, and a little heap of sovereigns lay upon the table by the young man's side.

A few whispered words, however, from Sarah caused him to leave the room and engage in the endeavour to pacify Mrs. Klipper, whom he found in the lower regions, crooning forth a most melancholy ditty in more lugubrious tones, of which the burden seemed to be an attempt to prove beyond all power of contradiction the old saying that "it is a poor heart that never rejoices." Certainly the lady had tried her best to warm her own particular bosom; but the effort had been overdone, for she was now very tipsy, and it was with much difficulty that the young man persuaded her

to retire for the night and submit herself to the ministrations of Sarah.

This little domestic episode occupied considerable time, and on regaining the room George found the Napoleon players reduced to four, whilst Stephens's pile of gold had almost entirely disappeared. The latter was more excited than ever, and was staking rashly even on very indifferent cards. The party at the whist-table were continuing their game steadily, the remainder busied in talking and now and then watching the game.

Donnington took up his position behind Stephens, for the purpose of advising him if possible. Unlike the others he had drank little or nothing, and his brain was perfectly clear; but nevertheless he thought he must surely be mistaken when he saw Kurylowicz trump a card after having thrown away one of a different colour at the last round of trumps—saw him, in short, revoke. He also remarked that he gathered the scattered cards together with great quickness at the close of each hand.

This was, in truth, an awkward dilemma. How could he, as host, bring an accusation of cheating against a man whom he had himself introduced, and for whose character he was clearly responsible? On the

other hand, suspecting that his friends were being fleeced by a sharper, ought he not to bring the game to an immediate close, even if he said nothing of a suspicion that amounted to positive certainty? Were these Russians common swindlers—one of them at least? No, impossible; they had been introduced to him by Ralowski: that vouched for them. He must have been mistaken; his eyes had deceived him—had played him false. He would carefully watch the succeeding games, and if he detected any knavery he would at once denounce the guilty party.

With this determination he carefully, but unobtrusively, watched the two following rounds. But everything appeared perfectly fair; the Russians lost on both occasions, and then to George's great delight the other Englishman jumped up and said he had played enough and was tired, whereupon Troianski rose also and quitted the table, whilst his countryman threw himself back in his chair—the game was over.

But this sudden termination by no means suited Stephens. He had again lost heavily, and was now in that reckless condition when a man cares nothing to what extent he plunges.

“What an infernal shame!” he cried; “and not only that, but it is positively unfair to win a fellow's

money, and then to refuse him his revenge. Sit down, again, Johnson, and you, gentlemen"—indicating the Russians—"will continue the game, will you not?" Both the clerk and Troianski shook their heads in refusal. "Come, sir," he continued, turning upon Kurylowicz, "you are a winner; you will not refuse a few more rounds—let us say three. I challenge you."

The Russian shrugged his shoulders, and smiled; he could not understand such vehemence. "I will certainly play again if you wish it," he said, calmly, "but with the understanding that we stop after the third round. Is it agreed?" and he stretched out his arm for the pack that George held.

"Agreed! and ten-pound stakes!" cried Stephens. "Let's cut for deal!"

"Oh! I will deal as I have the cards," said the Russian, carelessly, and he proceeded at once to do so.

George had been carefully watching Kurylowicz's every movement, as well as his fellow-countryman's, but the latter was at the other end of the room lighting a cigar, and had his back turned towards the players. There was evidently no collusion between them, or they were a more accomplished pair of knaves than he had ever heard of.

"May I advise Stephens?" he asked the Russian,

who at once gave a courteous assent, and the game began.

The first round Stephens won twenty pounds; at the second he lost thirty—now came the last, and final trial. The whist-party had broken up, and all the guests, attracted by the high stakes, were gathered round the players.

It was the Russian's deal, a disadvantage at Napoleon. The cards were cut, and he was about to distribute them when he suddenly said, "Troianski, give me a *petit verre, mon ami*; I am nervous."

A glass of brandy was handed to him by his friend, which he swallowed off, then he proceeded to deal.

"Look, Donnington, look!" whispered Stephens, after glancing at his cards. "Did you ever see such a hand? I shall go 'Nap'!"

It was, indeed, splendid, consisting of four honours in hearts, and the ace of spades. With such a hand it was folly not to risk a "Nap," and Stephens did so. He stood to win or lose one hundred pounds.

"Play this," whispered George, in a voice that startled even the listener, and he touched the ace of spades. "Do as I tell you," he hissed out. "If you make hearts trumps you are lost—it is a trap."

Half mechanically the new secretary obeyed, whilst

George closely scrutinized the face of his opponent. The Russian sat collected and immovable; but when the spade was led an irrepressible quiver passed over his features, and his deep-set eyes flashed fire.

Whilst the remaining cards were played—every trick was Stephens', Kurylowicz's hand consisting entirely of small hearts—George had moved quietly to the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. He now went behind the Russian, and, the moment the game was over, laid his hand on his shoulder, and broke the breathless suspense with which the termination of the struggle had been watched by saying, "Now, Monsieur Kurylowicz, be good enough to show us the pack of cards that are in the left-hand pocket of your coat, and of which this is one"—here he held up the eight of diamonds.

A murmur of surprise ran through the lookers-on, and the accused man first turned ghastly white, then rallied, and endeavoured to carry the matter off with a high hand, but it was useless. Honest Rufus Nugget—whose commercial integrity made him still bewail the abolition of capital punishment in cases of forgery—had at once dived into the indicated pocket, and now produced a pack exactly similar to those with which the last round had been played, but in which the eight

of diamonds was wanting. The swindler was now left without a leg to stand on, for even his fellow-countryman acknowledged his guilt.

"Pay your adversary what you have just lost," said George, concisely.

The Russian did so without a word.

"Now take your hat and be off. You may thank Count Balowski that I don't hand you over to the police as a common cardsharper. Now go!" and George held open the door, through which the detected man walked without a word, whilst Nugget with difficulty resisted the temptation to speed him onward with his boot.

After the lapse of a few minutes Troianski took his departure, a pained expression on his face, then the Englishmen remaining commenced eagerly to question George.

"The whole thing is simple enough," he replied. "Before Stephens sat down to this last bout I saw the Russian revoke. This roused my suspicion, and I got a notion that he had a pack concealed about him somewhere, so I handed him a pack from which I had taken a small diamond. The first two rounds were played with this pack, but for the third he substituted his own, which doubtless he had previously prepared. Do you remember his asking for brandy just before he

dealt? Well, he changed the cards then, and did it uncommonly neatly. Half you fellows were standing round him and noticed nothing. Now you see why I made Stephens play the ace of spades instead of leading with the ace of hearts and making that suit trumps. Had he led hearts the rascal would have trumped his last trick, his ace of spades, for the fellow had given himself five small hearts. He knows well enough that I always use cards with plain backs, so came provided with a pack. He must have arranged them when he made a pretext to leave the room some time ago. Now do not let us think any more about it."

"But you have saved me from ruin," said Stephens, now completely sobered. "It will prove a lesson, Donnington, believe me that it will."

This painful episode threw a gloom over the remainder of the evening, which some of them afterwards recalled. Before midnight even Mr. Nugget had bestowed his last good wishes on Donnington, and had departed for Peckham Rye, where, let us hope, he found Mrs. Rufus less exasperated than if he had made his entry with the dairyman.

On the afternoon of the following day George Donnington was walking up and down the platform of the London Chatham and Dover Station bound for the last-

named place. Mr. Bonham was with him, giving him his final instructions and much good advice. The guard shouts "All in, please!" the young man and his employer exchange a long, cordial hand-grip, while the latter mutters "God bless you, my lad!"; the door is banged to, the bell rings, the guard waves his green flag, the train starts. Good-bye now to the great metropolis!

Suddenly an arm appears at the window, and a hand drops a note upon the traveller's knees. Before he can see who has done this the train dashes under the bridge. What can it mean? What is the address? Yes, there can be no mistake, it bears plainly enough "George Donnington, Esq." He opens it as he rattles over the Thames; it contains one line only,

"You will live to repent last night's work.

"KURYLOWICZ."

"Impudent blackguard!" muttered the young man. "However, threatened men are proverbially long-lived," he reflected with a smile, and then began to make himself comfortable for the next two hours.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLMEWOOD.

Eva had been a year at Holmewood, and was equally pleased with her pupils and the place. On leaving Wakefield she had, at the earnest entreaty of Lady Randal, passed a fortnight at Morecambe Park. During the last few months she had developed into a very beautiful young woman, and her aunt attempted often to dissuade her from carrying out her resolve of earning a maintenance for herself. Sir Edward also was good enough to add his remonstrances. To his wife's intense astonishment, he manifested a strong liking for the girl; her grace and beauty pleased his eye, recalling the time when he also was young and sought after, and he even altered his usual morose habits for the sake of being in her society.

"Cannot your powers of persuasion induce that girl

to remain with us?" he querulously asked. "You can generally get your own way if you set your heart on a thing. At least such is my experience," he added with a slight sneer. Although afraid of his wife he could not resist giving her malicious little stabs whenever an opportunity presented itself.

"No, Edward, she is determined to go her own way. Let us hope that actual experience will cause a change in her resolve. She is the kind of girl who would sooner die than own herself beaten, so I confess I see little chance of her views altering. However I am glad she pleases you, and I will try again."

"Yes, do. Paint Holmewood in the blackest colours, and make Petworth—Haslemere, I mean—out to be a perfect Don Juan."

"So unjust an insinuation, which I must say does not sound very becoming when uttered by the boy's uncle, I shall leave you to make. I shall, on the contrary, say everything to prepossess her in his favour."

"You should not take everything *au pied de la lettre*," he grumbled. "One can never have a little joke with you now, Emily."

"Not if the witicisms are of such a nature," she replied, whereupon her husband shambled out of the room, muttering what sounded very much like "d——d

aggravating," and leaving Lady Randal mistress of the field.

All persuasion proved useless, as her aunt had expected, and Eva went to Holmewood, where she was most kindly received by Mrs. Mansfield, and soon made friends with the children, who fully answered the character she had received of them.

It was August ; she had been twelve months in the country, and was looking forward to a trip on the Continent with her young charges and Mrs. Mansfield, when a letter came that caused all their plans to be abandoned. It was from Lord Haslemere, and announced that he would arrive in England within a week, perhaps earlier if the wind was fair across the Bay of Biscay.

The children were in a state of the highest glee at the thought of seeing their favourite brother, and Eva herself felt no little curiosity concerning the young man in whose employ she was, and of whom she had heard so much and so favourably during her sojourn at Holmewood. If the accounts of her pupils were to be believed, Lord Haslemere was a *lusus naturæ*, the embodiment of everything noble, manly, and generous. As a correspondent he certainly did not shine, for only one letter from him had reached them during the whole

period of Eva's stay, and as this document consisted of barely three lines it threw but scanty light upon the writer's character. So a little curiosity was pardonable in the girl, who was still uncertain whether or not the young peer knew her name and history ; apparently he was in ignorance, for not the faintest allusion had been made to her in the letter above-mentioned.

As the time drew near for their brother's arrival, the children grew more and more excited, and when the morning broke on which he was actually due Eva saw that further study must be at an end. Docile and obedient as they were, it was impossible to keep their attention fixed on a book ; the grocer's cart rattling up the approach drew them irresistibly to the window ; the butler's footstep in the hall roused expectation and routed the 'ologies ; even botany, their favourite study, was cast to the winds ; so Eva, making a virtue of necessity, proposed that her charges should have a holiday, and amuse themselves by an impromptu picnic in the park.

"Yes, let us go to Blackridge Hollow," cried Alice, the youngest girl ; "we shall find the long-leaved hellebore there, and can make up a splendid bouquet for Charlie."

"You must be careful not to disturb the deer if you

visit the Hollow," remarked Mrs. Mansfield: "Sampson told me this morning that they are very wild and fierce just now. A stag chased two of Rooke's children some years ago and gored one very severely. Dangerous red brutes!" continued the lady, who had no sympathy with deer except in the shape of venison, "I shall ask your brother to destroy them all when he arrives. However, you will be careful, and if you meet any give them a wide berth."

It is to be feared that this timely warning had slight effect upon either Eva or her charges. There were only fallow-deer kept at Warham, and these the girl had never been taught to consider dangerous, so after a good luncheon beside the brook, which traversed this secluded part of the park, they all proceeded in search of the somewhat rare, long-leaved hellebore, with its creamy-white flowers and yellow anthers, or, as little Maud loved to call it, the *Cephalanthera ensifolia*.

Eva was sitting down to examine some of her botanical prizes when a cry of distress reached her ear, and, looking up, she saw the children rushing at full-speed towards her, followed slowly by a splendid stag, who shook his head menacingly, and seemed by no means disposed to tolerate the presence of strangers near his domain. A drove of timid, mild-eyed hinds stood at a

distance watching their champion as he advanced to the attack.

The girl sprang to her feet and hurried forward to meet the children, who took refuge behind her skirts in great terror. At sight of this new enemy the fury of the stag increased, and in place of retreating it trotted up to within three yards of Eva, and there stood with glaring eye, bristling mane, and distended nostrils, while from time to time a short quick stamp betokened its rage. It was not a pleasant picture for a young lady, armed with nothing more serviceable than a sunshade, to contemplate, but her presence of mind never for a moment forsook her.

"Run away, dears," she cried to the children, who by clinging to her dress impeded her movements; "run away, keeping me between you and the deer, and cross the plank over the brook. There is nothing to fear."

Brave words, but wholly unheeded by the girls, who were paralyzed with terror, and unable to move a step.

And now the stag seemed to be conscious of the weakness of his enemies, for with a bound he advanced, and suddenly rearing up on his hind legs struck out furiously and with lightning rapidity at Eva, who dauntlessly held her ground, keeping the point of the parasol directed towards the animal's head. On this

feeble weapon the sharp hoofs fell, and cut the silk with the cleanness of a razor.

Having delivered his first onslaught the stag withdrew preparatory to another charge, and again Eva, who now saw the terrible danger to which they were all exposed, intreated the children to run away. She could have then slowly retreated with her face to the foe, and perhaps might have gained the plank without injury. It was the only chance, as no help was to be hoped for in that solitary place ; but the children clung mutely to her, helpless with fear ; whilst she herself raised no cry for assistance, but faced the brute with silent determination.

Now the stag repeated his attack, bounding forward, rearing up and striking out more viciously than before. Had the girl flinched the cruel antlers would have found a living sheath ; had the frail weapon been lowered, those fierce blows would have descended on the shapely head, and cut through hat, hair, and skull to the brain.

As it is, one foot dashes the shattered parasol to the ground, whilst the keen hoof with which the other is armed descends upon the ungloved hand and inflicts a terrible gash, from which a crimson torrent rushes forth, turning the front of the light summer-robe to its own sanguine hue.

The pain is unfelt in the fearful excitement, but now she is wholly unarmed, and feels that with the ebbing blood her strength is failing her. The next attack must be fatal. Will the brute rest satisfied with one victim, or must the two innocent lives dependent upon her be sacrificed also? Another moment will solve it all, for the stag's mane becomes rigid as wire, he is gathering himself together for the final onslaught * * * *

Why does he not bound forward and end it all? Why do his fiery eyes wander from his victims and rove restlessly towards the brook? Why? A cheery shout reaches her ear; the sound of footsteps is audible on the plank; a man's form springs before her, and a strong arm rains a shower of blows with an oak-stick on the furious stag. She hears the children murmur "Charlie"; has a dim notion that her preserver is tall and sunburnt, then consciousness forsakes her, and she sinks helplessly to the ground, still shielding with her body the terrified girls.

Was it all a dream? Where is she? Who was this supporting her throbbing head and bathing her wounded hand tenderly with water contained in his felt hat? How came the wound? Who could this dark stranger be? Memory with a rush resumes its empire, the whole scene with the stag recurs to her; there stand her

charges trembling, with pale and tear-stained cheeks;—all is clear now; she has fainted, and this is Lord Haslemere, who having beaten off her assailant is endeavouring to render her all the aid that lies within his power.

“Now we shall soon be all right,” he cries cheerfully on seeing his patient open her eyes. “Maud, you little goose, run off to Houghton’s cottage and tell him to send at once to Holmewood for a conveyance, whilst his wife brings me some linen bandages, needles, and thread. Be off with you both, and show what stuff you are made of in an emergency. I cannot leave you myself,” he said apologetically to Eva, when his little sisters had scampered away at full speed, “for I must keep my fingers pressed on the wound until bandages arrive. Could you drink a little of this? It is only sherry,” and he produced a silver travelling-flask, the stopper of which he held firmly in his teeth, whilst he unscrewed it with his disengaged hand. “Now you will soon feel better,” he added, as Eva swallowed a few mouthfuls of the wine. “How lucky that I had the flask in my pocket! Do not attempt to speak,” he continued eagerly, for the stimulants had rushed like quicksilver through the girl’s frame, reviving her magically, and making her anxious to ask a few

questions. "Mrs. Houghton will be here soon, and then, when your hand is bound up, we can see what will be the best course. I have a rough knowledge of surgery, and can make you comfortable until proper aid can be obtained."

And when the bailiff's wife at length did arrive with the necessary appliances the young Earl showed no mean skill in the passing and adjustment of bandages; and after the hand had been placed in a sling Eva declared herself sufficiently recovered to walk to the cottage, a feat she succeeded in performing with the assistance of Lord Haslemere's arm; and when the barouche arrived she was safely conveyed to Holmewood, where the village doctor was in waiting. This gentleman re-dressed the wound and gave his patient a composing draught, but little or no sleep visited her that night; the shock to the nervous system had been very severe; Mrs. Mansfield, who watched by her, reported that she seemed to have the vision of the stag's attack ever before her eyes; and when the doctor visited her on the following morning he found that brain-fever had set in, and that Eva was delirious.

It was three weeks before the girl was sufficiently recovered to leave her bed, and to lie down on a sofa drawn up to the open window. There she could allow

her eyes to range at will over the broad park, whose trees were fast assuming their autumnal hues; could watch the cattle peacefully grazing, and admire the deer as they couched lazily and gracefully amongst the ferny undergrowth. Lord Haslemere she had only seen at a distance, when he walked about the grounds; but his features seemed quite familiar to her, and the children took remarkably good care that he was never five minutes out of her thoughts. Naturally they delighted to talk of the stag adventure, the most eventful episode in their innocent lives, and every day added to Eva's stock of knowledge respecting what had transpired during her swoon. A warm battle had raged between the sisters as to whom the credit was due of having first espied their rescuer, and peace had only been restored by a reference to Eva, who, with great impartiality, pronounced that both claimants had seen their brother at the same moment—a judgment that gave universal satisfaction and prevented all heart-burning. On every other point they were unanimous.

“Charlie had a thick stick and struck the stag over the nose,” cried Alice.

“And continued beating him until the horrid beast was glad enough to run away,” added Maud.

"And Charlie shot the stag himself the next day : didn't he, Maud ?"

"Yes, and we had one of the haunches last week. The other was sent to Uncle Edward at Morecambe. Charlie said a beast that could attack a pretty girl like Miss Donnington was only fit for pasties. He did," persisted this communicative young lady, disregarding Eva's heightened colour and imploring gesture; "I heard him tell Mrs. Mansfield so."

"And on the morning afterwards he was in a furious passion with Doctor Goldsmith for not coming earlier," struck in Alice; "I never saw Charlie so cross."

"Oh ! yes. He was much worse when Doctor Goldsmith had dressed Miss Donnington's hand, and he found out that there was no ice in the house. He threatened to turn poor old Wiggins away, and sent off one of the grooms to Midhurst for a supply."

"But was it not funny, Miss Donnington ? Charlie took you for some one else when he first saw you. You were insensible at the time ; but I heard him distinctly call you Miss Percival more than once. I asked him afterwards how he came to make such a stupid mistake ; but he told me I was a little simpleton and couldn't hear right. He does not like to be found out saying

silly things. Why, what is the matter, dear Miss Donnington? How pale you are!"

So Lord Haslemere knew who she was and all about her; this the child's babble had conclusively shown. Of course, Lady Randal must have communicated her real story; it would not have been just had she kept it secret. However, the young man evidently wished to know her only as Donnington now, and she would so carefully school herself that no suspicion should enter his mind that she was aware of his being in possession of her history. For the rest events must shape themselves. The solicitude he showed for her, the expense he had incurred in obtaining the best medical advice from London—all pointed to a certain amount of interest in her welfare and gratitude for her care of his sisters. She would be sufficiently recovered to move downstairs in a few days, then she would meet him; or perhaps by that time he would have left Holmewood. So again she determined to give no further consideration to the matter.

But Lord Haslemere had not the slightest intention of roaming until he had seen Eva and thanked her for saving the children's lives. This her bold defence had certainly accomplished, and he would have held himself as basely ungrateful had he left before ascertaining

that she was far advanced towards recovery. So he occupied himself about the estate, and was a little puzzled to account for his thoughts always tending towards one direction—the invalid upstairs. Charles Haslemere's was not a susceptible nature, and he had passed wholly unscathed beneath the batteries of many bright eyes; but now he found his thoughts constantly reverting to the scene by the brook. He saw the infuriated stag rearing its bulk aloft and striking pitilessly at the graceful form that faced his onslaught so dauntlessly; he saw his little sisters, who were very dear to him, in imminent danger and clinging in helpless terror to the skirts of their protectress; he recalled the shapely head, with its pale but lovely features, which he had supported on his arm; and saw again the cruel gash in the white hand, from which the red drops oozed at each pulsation. He remembered his fears lest one so young and beautiful should never recover from the lengthened swoon, and his joy on perceiving the first faint hue of colour and the slight quivering of the closed lids that heralded returning consciousness; he saw the dark brown eyes open slowly, and was still haunted by the wondering wistful gaze with which they met his.

He had much of both painter and poet in his compo-

sition, and the whole scene came before his mind's eye even when Houghton was endeavouring to impart the advantages of deep-drainage or other agricultural mysteries. He delighted to take his sisters with him, and to hear them prattle of Miss Donnington, of her patience, her kindness, her cleverness—he could himself bear witness to her courage. For the last six years—in fact, ever since leaving Oxford—he had wandered abroad in the most unfrequented regions of the world, pursuing his favourite sports—shooting, fishing, and yachting. Early in life he had been seized with the longing to make his name known as a mighty Nimrod, and circumstances had enabled him to gratify his tastes without let or hindrance. His mother—a sister of Sir Edward Randal—had died young, leaving two sons, Charles Viscount Petworth and Fulke—the latter two years his brother's junior. The late Earl had married again, later on in life, his second wife being Miss Montagu, a sister of Sir George Montagu, a distinguished diplomat, now Minister at the Court of St. Petersburg. By this lady he became the father of two daughters, the children to whom Eva was governess; but the messenger who gave him the tidings of Alice's birth had also to communicate the sad intelligence that the Earl was once again a widower.

—his young Countess had succumbed beneath the pangs of maternity. Nothing could comfort him. Twice he had seen those he dearly loved called from his side in early womanhood by the unrelenting hand of death ; twice had the bark of his domestic happiness suffered shipwreck ; he imagined that Providence had dealt unjustly with him ; refused even to see the infant to whose advent he ascribed his present desolation ; took no pleasure in the growing strength and ability of his sons ; but sank into a state of gloomy misanthropy, from which he was released by death shortly after Lord Petworth had attained his majority.

Charles St. John now found himself an Earl and hereditary legislator, with a clear rent-roll, and a large sum of money in hand. His brother Fulke had joined the *corps diplomatique*, and already promised to distinguish himself in that line, while his half-sisters would be in the nursery for many years to come ; thus, nothing stood between him and the enjoyment of his favourite pursuits. India, Canada, the Rocky Mountains, and Northern Africa had all been visited by him in his capacity of sportsman ; and now he had just returned from two years spent amongst the Abyssinian highlands, and upon the head-waters of the Blue Nile. Wherever sportsmen met Haslemere was talked of, his

pluck, endurance, and good luck. Even the professional ivory-hunters, who invariably decline the presence of an amateur, acknowledged the prowess of the young Englishman, and welcomed him eagerly to their ranks. If fame as a mighty slayer of beasts was the end that lay nearest his heart he had certainly obtained it; and, nothing wearied by his Abyssinian campaign, he was only waiting until his yacht, the "Zephyr," had completed her repairs, before starting off to some other remote region; he had not yet settled quite its whereabouts, but thought a turn amongst the bears in the Arctic would brace him up after the heat of Africa.

His personal appearance was very prepossessing; for, although he would never be regarded as handsome, his features were singularly pleasing; and his sinewy, athletic frame at once attracted the attention of the sex, who, like good Queen Bess, love to gaze upon a man of mould. His manners were quiet and unobtrusive, and he was a general favourite at the clubs and amongst his dependents. Into the scurry and turmoil of London society he entered but little, and was innocent as a child of women—their crooked ways and pleasing wiles. Bright glances he had encountered often, but their shafts had glanced harmlessly from his proof-mail of courteous indifference. A warm and affectionate heart,

however, lay concealed beneath that harness; and when Cupid bestirred himself in earnest, and winged the steel, it would speedily find a penetrable joint and pierce the gold. Such was the young man whose opportune arrival on the scene had saved Eva Donnington and her charges from a cruel mangling, if not from death.

The weather was lovely, balmy and bright, and each succeeding day found Eva further on the road leading from convalescence to perfect health. Still an unknown instinct caused her to retain her room. For some undefinable reason she shrank from meeting the man to whom she owed her life; and it would be unbecoming in a faithful chronicler to pass over in silence the fact that the girl had dwelt seriously upon the *rencontre* and upon her deliverer; for never, even in such realms of fiction as she had explored, had a more romantic meeting been portrayed, or hero appeared to the rescue of distressed damsel at more opportune moment. She must have been built of ice had she failed to ponder deeply upon the adventure, and she was in truth a warm-hearted, affectionate girl, with no frozen particle in her whole composition. So to her also, during the long hours of convalescence, there appeared with startling frequency the mental image of a sun-

burnt face with brown beard and moustache bent anxiously over her ; and again and again she saw the look of relief that passed over that face when her eyes wholly unclosed, while the cheery, ringing tones of encouragement seemed still to linger in her ears. What maiden with a spark of imagination or gratitude would have remained unassailed by such visions ? Certainly not Eva Donnington, or she should have found no place in this veracious narrative.

Still the girl endeavoured to postpone the meeting she both dreaded and wished for. Perhaps if she remained invisible for a little while longer Lord Haslemere would depart, but this he showed no intention of doing ; and at last the courteous doctor himself suggested that his patient should quit her room and take a quiet drive about the park. There was no use in further resisting fate, and, besides this, conscience whispered that she should resume her duties as governess ; so one day she descended to luncheon, and in five minutes the whole dreaded interview was at an end.

“I wonder whether I looked amazingly silly !” she pondered, recalling in the solitude of her room the minutest circumstances of the meeting. “I know I blushed horribly, for I felt my cheeks glowing like coals when he held my hand and thanked me for

standing between those little monkeys and the stag. How earnestly he spoke and how his voice faltered when he said he should ever feel grateful to me for the gift I had made him! How gracefully and yet how naturally he put it, 'the gift of three lives, two sisters' and a friend's, for you must let me be admitted to that title, Miss Donnington.' Then whilst I stood blushing like a fool he led me to a chair and told Mrs. Mansfield the best direction for a sheltered yet pretty drive, quite forgetting that we both know the park even better than himself. Well now the romance is over, and I must settle down into harness again. Heigh-ho! how noble and handsome he looked when " * * * * but it were desecration to follow further the maiden's meditations.

Two days later Eva was at work with her pupils in the schoolroom, when there was a tap at the door and Lord Haslemere entered.

"Put away your books, children," he cried; "and you, Miss Donnington, must pardon my invading your sanctum so unceremoniously, but I could not bear that any one else should bring you—the girls I mean—the good news. Old Goldsmith declares we all want change, more especially you, Miss Donnington, and recommends Worthing as quieter and milder than Brighton. I have

telegraphed to the Marine for rooms, and you and Mr^s. Mansfield are to drive down to-morrow in the barouche. I shall take the children this afternoon by rail and have everything comfortable for you on arrival. Be quiet, Alice! you have torn the pocket of my coat already!" for on hearing the news the girls had jumped up and were clinging to their brother in sheer exuberance of spirits. "Goldsmith says we shall soon bring the roses back into your cheeks, Miss Donnington. When those lazy shipwrights have patched up the 'Zephyr' we will have her round and get a real sniff of the briny. Don't take more luggage than you require for the night, children—all our traps can go together to-morrow. You like the idea?" he added, turning to Eva.

"Oh! immensely!" replied the girl, frankly.

"Then I am doubly pleased that old Goldsmith should have hit upon such a brilliant idea," he said, smiling, and quitted the room, not caring to confess that he was the sole originator of an artful device by which he could enjoy much more of Eva's society than at present; probably he was himself unaware of the secret springs that prompted him to propose this sudden fitting to the doctor.

Perhaps the six weeks passed at Worthing were more enjoyable than anything that Eva had yet experienced.

The carriage was kept there, and every afternoon was devoted to drives in the neighbourhood. The girl at first made a feeble attempt to secure the earlier part of the day for study ; but her pupils waxed rebellious, backed up in their mutiny by the wily Earl. This gentleman professed a passionate devotion to botany, a branch of science which he had hitherto grievously neglected, and he always accompanied the children and Eva on their rambles, grubbing up nettles and thistles with a wholesome if indiscriminating zeal, and manifesting the greatest anxiety to be enlightened regarding their structure and peculiarities, thirsting, in short, for such information as could only be obtained by bending down and attentively scrutinising the specimen that his fair instructress held between her fingers. He was remarkably slow to learn on such occasions, requiring explanation on the most minute points, and drawing down upon his head the contempt of his little sisters ; but even their scorn failed to disturb his equanimity or to quicken his intelligence.

Then, after bestowing many hearty maledictions on the laggard shipwrights, he started off for Southampton, and so sorely worried those unhappy artificers that within a week the "Zephyr" anchored off Worthing. Then came a series of delightful trips, for the schooner

was of large size, and could accommodate the whole party. Fulke St. John, now Secretary of Legation at Berne, had joined them, and they visited all the places of interest on both the French and English coasts. The weather continued delightful; life, with Eva, passed like a dream.

Lord Haslemere and his brother sat before a café at Cherbourg, smoking; Mrs. Mansfield, Eva, and the children, were sleeping on board the yacht. Both men were silent for some quarter-of-an-hour, either buried in their own thoughts or enjoying the beauty of the cloudless sky, across which the full moon was sailing, casting a silvery sheen upon the breakwater and shipping. Suddenly Fulke spoke, and, apparently, his remark had reference to an unfinished conversation.

"Big game is well enough in its way; but a man should not devote the best years of his life to bowling over tigers and grizzlies. You have done quite enough in that line, Charlie, so chuck it up, and carry out what has been in your mind ever since I arrived, and, Heaven only knows, how long before!"

"And what may that be?" asked the Earl, somewhat amazed.

"Why, marry Eva, and let the big game go to the devil!" said the young diplomat, with unwonted

energy. "She is worth all the ivory between here and the Zambesi!"

Lord Haslemere made no reply, and the brothers smoked on in silence until their boatmen came, when they were pulled on board. If the Earl did not speak he certainly thought a good deal.

CHAPTER IX.

“ TY WALECIZNY ? ”

GEORGE had been eighteen months at Odessa, and had, a year ago, taken over the reins of government from Mr. Bonsfield, who departed to establish another branch house for the firm at Trebizond. Donnington was naturally apt at learning, and picked up the details of his business with a quickness that astonished the former manager, whose habits were methodical and who hated innovations. Directly the latter had left, his successor made several alterations that already bade fair to increase the importance of the house, and which met with Andrew Bonham's cordial approval. The offices of the firm had hitherto stood in a by-street, some distance from the wharves and from the business

centre, and were both cramped and incommodious. George rented a fine place in the busiest part of the city, where the clerks had air and elbow-room, and where the firm made a show proportionate to the magnitude of its operations. Increased business rewarded this move, and, altogether, Donnington's management promised to be a success. Unlike his predecessor, who was *gauche* and unpolished, George entered largely into Russian society, gaining an *entrée* easily through his old friend, Prince Soudakoff, to whom Bonham had confided the outline of his history.

About a mile from the railway station at Tiraspol, in spacious grounds that embraced at least a hundred acres, stood the château of Prince Soudakoff. If the huge stone building possessed little architectural beauty, it could vie with most of our English country-residences in extent and comfort. The exterior, indeed, strongly resembled a workhouse—a massive, oblong edifice of two stories, flanked by a pavilion, or orangery, where the choicest flowers could always be found, even in the depth of winter. But, on entering the house, its outward ugliness was speedily forgotten. A spacious columned portico, with two broad flights of marble steps, led into a magnificent hall, from whence was reached the various reception-rooms and the apart-

ments occupied by the family and their guests. These were all situated on the *belle étage*, the basement containing only the offices. Every luxury that wealth could procure was gathered together within those walls ; but a refined taste had guided the selection of the pictures, tapestry, and other *objets de luxe*, whilst the presence of ladies was indicated by a thousand little familiar signs, which gave a habitable air to the rooms, and took away all the stiffness of strained regularity.

It was evening ; three men were strolling up and down the marble pavement of the orangery, the entire length of which was visible in the soft, subdued light shed by many Chinese lanterns. The heavy fragrance of the citrons and oleanders struck almost overpoweringly on the senses, while the soft monotone of a fountain wooed the listener to repose on one of the divans with which this luxurious retreat was furnished. Two of the three men now smoking their cigars are known to us already : one is George Donnington, who has grown a beard and whiskers since we last saw him, and is altogether more formed and manly ; the other is Prince Soudakoff, close-shaven as of yore, except on the upper lip, where a waxed moustache is seen, and unaltered save that the hair is slightly greyer

and thinner. The third person is in undress uniform, a well-built military-looking man, who would be decidedly handsome were it not for a sinister expression imparted by a slight obliquity in his vision, a defect which calls immediate attention to the fact that the light green-grey eyes are planted much too close together in the head, giving an impression of cunning which the otherwise regular features cannot disguise. This officer is Alexis Count Bodiskoff, head of the Third Section in Kherson, and perhaps the most dreaded personage in Southern Russia. He certainly does not look very formidable as he bends forward courteously whilst listening to his host, who is mounted on his old hobby, and is holding forth at length on the works he has commenced building, and the improvements he hopes to see effected.

"I only failed in the north because my people were led astray. They were ignorant, credulous, and superstitious. Here the peasants have had more intercourse with the outer world and are proportionately more liberal in their ideas. With these men I shall succeed."

"Every man who loves the welfare of his country must wish you success," said the Count. "But our peasantry are little better than cattle and you will find the task hard."

“ Never fear,” rejoined Soudakoff, cheerfully. “ But suppose we join the ladies and have a little music if you have finished your cigars.”

Both men followed their host through several rooms until a charming little apartment was reached, the fittings of which showed unmistakeably that it was a boudoir. Here they found two ladies, one of whom can be best described as “ fair, fat, and forty ”; whilst the other, who was seated at the piano running her hands caressingly over the keys, was a young girl of eighteen, with slender but graceful figure; a small head delicately poised on faultless shoulders; and with magnificent raven hair gathered back from the low broad brow, and simply fastened in a knot behind.

The elder lady half rose on their entry and beckoned to George with her fan; the younger seemed wholly unconscious of their presence, and continued the air that she was playing—an air of inexpressible tenderness and sadness; the rhythmical outpouring of an oppressed race—whilst her gaze pierced far, far beyond the wall that bounded her material vision, for, as the poet sings of the gladiator, “ her eyes were with her heart and that was far away.” The expression of the face was wondrously beautiful in its entranced sadness, and the brightness of the dark grey orbs was dimmed

by the moisture that the plaintive notes called up. All three men stood motionless for a moment, brought to an involuntary standstill both by the weird beauty of the melody and of the fair artist who improvised it; but the Princess, seeing that George disregarded her summons, called him by name, and the sound of her voice broke the spell: the girl ceased playing and would have risen from her stool, but in three strides Count Bodiskoff was at her side.

“Pray do not quit the instrument yet,” he whispered, bending over her and speaking in a low tone inaudible to the other inmates of the boudoir. “Why do you always tantalize me by leaving off directly I enter the room?” and there was an accent of reproach in the speaker’s voice.

A change had come over the girl’s fair face; it was still beautiful—wondrously lovely; but an expression of contempt curled the lips, and the delicate nostrils quivered slightly as she replied, “Such music as I love can possess few charms for Count Bodiskoff.”

“Nay, but play once more for me, Countess Yanina: may I not call you Yanina?” he continued, on remarking the crimson flush that rushed to her cheek on hearing the familiarity—“Will you not be Yanina to me?”

The girl bit her lip almost until the blood came before replying; then she murmured, "You would not dare to insult me if"

The sentence was unfinished; but the glance of mingled hatred and scorn that supplied the place of words would have pierced a bosom armed with triple brass. "You wish me to play again, Count Bodis-koff?" she said aloud, so that her voice reached the other members of the party. "Very well. With pleasure. But you must permit me to choose my own tune!" and before the sentence was concluded her fingers were on the keyboard, and through the room there rang the touching strains of the Polish National Hymn.

"Ty walecizny ma smielzy Laynka?"

A sullen scowl passed over the Russian's face, and his feline eyes glared at the performer; but in a moment all sign of displeasure had vanished, and he stood listening courteously to the end of a hymn every bar of which is rigidly proscribed in Russia; he even raised his hand in deprecation when the Princess gave a little scream, and the Prince would have interfered to stop the performer, who, with defiant mien and flashing eyes, played the ode on to its last note. Then turning on her stool she asked in tones quivering with

suppressed indignation, "Does that please you, Count Bodiskoff?"

"Some day you shall rue this bitterly!" was the officer's inward ejaculation, but outwardly his manner was courteous in the extreme as he thanked the girl with much effusion, remarking quietly at the end to the Prince: "The Countess should be careful not to play that in mixed company. Here, of course, we are all friends, and it is no matter. Nay, do not scold your ward, Princess," he continued, as that lady in an agony of terror at Yanina's indiscretion and folly approached the piano to upbraid her; "we all know the loyalty of the house of Soudakoff, and it was at my request that the Countess played."

When the party separated for the night, four out of their number had abundant cause for reflection. Of these the Princess was not one. Possessed of a tranquil phlegmatic disposition, and moreover endowed with an excellent digestion, that good lady sank to sleep the moment her head touched the pillow. Although easily excited, the placidity of her nature reasserted itself immediately on the removal of the disturbing influence. Hers was not a mind that could suffer deeply or lastingly. She was thoroughly kind, good-natured, an affectionate wife and a good mistress of an establishment

where every care was taken from her shoulders, but she lacked depth of feeling, and thus went through life with one tithe of the anxiety that worries humanity in general.

With the remaining four it was far otherwise. Let us exercise the novelist's prerogative and take a glimpse into the breasts of each, and—*place aux dames*.

Yanina Bromirska had dismissed her maid, and was now sitting in an arm-chair in her bed-room, clad in a loose robe, and with her bare feet carelessly thrust into small furred slippers. Her face still wore the look of defiance that had marked it during the progress of the hymn, and the hot blood mantled in her cheeks as she recalled the words of Count Bodiskoff.

“Cowardly!” she murmured. “A base, unmanly coward, who makes use of his official position to force his hateful love upon one whom he knows detests him. And he hints in unmistakeable terms that unless I listen to his suit he will avenge himself upon my guardian—my second father. What can he know against the Prince, who is the most generous and conscientious man in Russia? Yet he plainly infers that the suspicions of the Government have fallen upon my guardian, and does not scruple to say that ill will betide him if I reject his odious suit. A disgrace to the nobility and to the

army of his country! A man born of gentle blood, yet one who does not think it beneath his dignity to hold high office under the tyrannical Third Section—to head an array of common spies and informers! Every day his boldness increases, and to-night he has dared to call me by my christian name. But let him beware of encroaching too far upon my patience. My noble countrywoman, Basienka Szamborska, found a Russian heart the fittest sheath for the dagger of an injured Polish maiden, and her blood runs in my veins—her spirit could steel my nerves and strengthen my arm. Not even the awful knout that mangled her form could wring from her one word of repentance for the deed. I, too, could suffer and be strong; I feel it within me. But alas!” and here her eyes became suffused with tears, “alas! my hands are tied. The cunning villain holds me by an invisible but irresistible chain—love for my guardian and his wife. All sins committed by me will be visited on their heads, and my wicked indiscretion of to-night was little short of a sin. It is true”—a bitter smile hovered over her lips—“that I have no longer the knout to fear, but the paternal Russian Government knows well how to reach its victims without awakening the indignation of Western Europe. Women now are exempted from public torture by the public

executioner, but devices still more fiendlike exist by which we can be brought to sorrow and our hearts broken. And Alexis Bodiskoff commands this vile machinery, and his base nature will not recoil from its employment. What shall I do? God give me strength and judgment to act aright in this awful crisis. If he wants the small fortune belonging to me, or even the rich inheritance that will some day be mine, let him take it. Freely would I give every rod of land, and every copeck, to pay his gambling-debts, if he would only release me from this unmanly, this cruel, persecution ;” and worn out by mental suffering the girl threw herself upon her knees and prayed long and earnestly for help and guidance. A flood of tears burst from the overcharged bosom, and she arose calmed and resolute.

Meanwhile Count Bodiskoff was pacing up and down his room, wrapped in a comfortable dressing-gown, and with a large cigar in his mouth. On a small table stood a decanter of cognac, a carafe of water, and a tumbler half-full, which he paused a moment to drain and then continued his walk.

“ Obstinate little Polish devil ! ” he mused, and the object thus elegantly apostrophised was Yanina Bromirska. “ I will break her spirit yet, and make her glad to dismount from her high horse, and grovel in

the dust at my feet. I hold a lever that will bring her to her senses in a disagreeable but very effectual manner. Would that I had her in Warsaw or Wilna, and that the old *régime* under Berg and Muravieff still existed. How we squeezed their very nationality out of the Polish rascals in sixty-three! The knout for the men; the rod for the women! Those were glorious times, and a man's motives were little inquired into. Curses on the squeamishness that seems now to possess the Government. This man Alexander lacks his father's iron will. He is well-meaning, but absurdly lenient—weak—very weak!"

Suddenly another train of thought crossed his brain, and he stamped angrily on the floor, whilst his brows became deeply knitted. "How am I to raise the money to pay Baratoff?" he murmured. "That fellow has the devil's luck! I am a pretty faithful follower of his satanic majesty—why does he not favour me? Money I must have; and yet Mosiek Szluma tells me that the scoundrel, Icek Askanazy, will not advance another copeck. If I am unable to meet the bill I gave Baratoff when it falls due I am ruined. Perhaps it has already passed into other hands. Oh! Jew dogs!" he cried aloud, grinding his strong teeth together in his wrath, and shaking his clenched fist vindictively.

“Hebrew hounds! You shall live bitterly to repent your niggardliness! These vermin sniff out misfortunes as a vulture scents out carrion. They have divined my straitened circumstances, and are insolent in proportion to my great need. But they shall suffer. I will make them wish that they had parted with every shekel in their stores before they made an enemy of Alexis Bodiskoff. Were it but once known that I was betrothed to little Bromirska the rascals would press their money-bags upon me. How superb she looked in her defiance when she played the Polish Hymn! I commenced the pursuit of that girl for her fortune, and I shall end by being madly in love with her. Szluma tells me that her cousin is too infirm to marry, and cannot live long. At his death she will be the richest heiress in Poland. Could I but marry her the setting-star of the Bodiskoffs would rise in renewed glory. And mine she shall be,” he muttered vindictively, after filling and emptying a strong glass of brandy—“mine, whether she likes it or not. I sometimes think she has taken a fancy to that young Englishman, Donnington. I must look up his antecedents in the records. I wonder whether he would lend me a few thousand roubles to meet this cursed bill? My ill-luck makes me almost vow never to touch the paste-

boards again. How marvellously chance—or skill—favours that fellow Baratoff, maledictions on him!” but at this point Count Bodiskoff, having finished his cigar and the decanter, disposed himself to rest.

Prince Soudakoff's reflections were not pleasant. A Russian himself, he knew the power possessed by the Count, whilst, as a man of the world, he clearly saw that gentleman's object, and his whole nature rebelled against his ward becoming the bride of a profligate *roué* and notorious gambler. Still, he dared not openly discourage Bodiskoff's pretensions—he was too powerful to be lightly provoked—and Yanina had carefully concealed both from her guardian and his wife the persecution to which the Count subjected her. Soudakoff, therefore, only perceived that a man of no principle was paying marked attention to his adopted daughter—a man whom he both disliked and despised, but whose presence he was forced to endure—and he laid his head on the pillow with the fixed determination of opposing every obstacle to Bodiskoff's suit, short of bringing about a rupture with one who possessed such important influence for good or evil.

“Why not have taken a straightforward course?” the English reader will ask, “and forbidden the fellow the house?—Why not?”

The answer is easy. Soudakoff was a Russian, and had gained considerable insight into his country's mode of administering justice.

The thoughts that occupied George Donnington whilst undressing, and until he tumbled into the huge four-poster, whose soft feather-bed and coverlet nearly smothered him, will not take long to record. They ran somewhat in this fashion :—

“ What a charming trick the dear little Countess played our hangdog-looking friend ; and how gloriously lovely she looked when she struck up ‘ Ty walecizny ! ’ By Jove ! it was a regular quencher for Bodiskoff ! and yet the fellow carried it off well, too ! I wonder whether he would be so civil to me if he knew that I have got his bill for ten thousand roubles locked up in the safe ? Prince Baratoff seemed to consider it remarkably good security ; and so it is, for the matter of that ; but the Count would be terribly annoyed if he thought that it had fallen into my hands. And I firmly believe the fellow is hanging about here in the hope that Yanina will take a fancy to him—impudent beast ! However, he will only lose his time, and probably his temper, for I know she would sooner die than marry a Russian, she hates them so much. What an angel she is ! and what a nuisance that I

must return to Odessa to-morrow, leaving this swivel-eyed soldier in the field."

Sleep put an end to George's further reflections ; and after breakfast on the following morning he departed for the station, finding, to his great delight, that Bodiskoff would be his companion, that officer having received a telegram which necessitated his immediate return to the city. Thus if absent himself no rival remained behind to worry him.

Neither men spoke much in the train, the Russian being apparently occupied with the perusal of despatches, although in reality he was meditating whether this was a good opportunity to broach the subject of a little pecuniary accommodation. Seemingly it was not, for they parted very amicably at the station without any allusion to money, and each went his way, the colonel to his office, the manager to his private residence.

"Tell Mosiek Szluma that I want him," said Bodiskoff to the orderly who answered his bell, "and admit no one whilst he is with me."

He had looked over the letters and reports that had accumulated during his short absence, and now strode up and down the room impatiently, cigar in mouth, waiting for the man he had summoned. A gentle tap was heard presently at the door, and, in answer to the

Count's thundering "Come in," a head slowly protruded itself into the room ; and a whining voice asked tremulously, "Does your Excellency want poor old Mosiek Szluma ?"

"Enter, and shut the door," cried Bodiskoff, sharply, whereupon a thin bent figure, clad in a long blue cloth robe trimmed with fur, shining and greasy from long use, and hairless at all points the least exposed to friction, followed the head, and shambled forward to the chair towards which his employer contemptuously pointed.

"When did Kurylowicz arrive?" asked the latter.

"Yesterday, Excellency, and Schimkow is to follow in a few days."

"Good! Has Schimkow provided himself with all evidence against Prince Soudakoff in case it becomes necessary to effect a sudden arrest ?"

"Kurylowicz tells me that he will come with the necessary evidence."

"Good!" repeated Bodiskoff. "Now tell me whether your usurious tribe are going to find me any money, or whether I shall be forced to get up a *Judenhetze* and help myself. You can explain to them which course is the best for themselves."

The Jew shook back the matted elf-locks that hung

over his face and half concealed his cunning glittering eyes and hooked nose, whilst a gleam of concentrated rage and hate flashed upon the Count, who observed it with an insolent smile. The voice, however, was abject enough as Mosiek whined in seeming despair, "God of Abraham! A *Judenhetze*!! Is the Excellency joking with his servant? Alas, we are downtrodden enough, and to incite the populace against the money-lenders would bring no benefit to the Excellency. Our wealthiest brethren have crossed the frontier"—here a tone of malicious satisfaction was distinctly recognisable—"Icek Askanazy and Yosef Rujahka went to Vienna a week ago. Only Berek Gold remains, and he is poor—very poor! He has lent much money, even some to his Highness the Governor, who would not like to see him ill-used."

"Well, well," said Bodiskoff, who saw he had gone too far, "I was not in earnest. Your interest is too closely bound up with my continued prosperity for me to have any fears that the money will not be forthcoming. You must always remember the tie that unites us, Mosiek."

Both tone and words were less brutal than any the Count had hitherto employed, yet the Jew shivered on hearing them, a thrill ran through his meagre frame,

and he seemed to shrivel up like a piece of parchment thrown on a fierce fire. Bodiskoff had watched him attentively and seemed well pleased with the effect he had produced, for he suddenly started another subject.

“Listen now, Mosiek. You know the young Englishman who manages the house of Bonham—Donnington?”—the Jew by a bow signified assent—“Well, your duty now is to find out all about him. He speaks Russian well—learnt it in England he says—and mentioned a Count Ralowski as one of his chief instructors. I never heard of a Ralowski in exile.”

The Jew chuckled and choked with ghastly merriment, but at length recovered sufficiently to wheeze out: “Ralowski, Excellency! Why Ralowski and Schimkow are the same person. In a few days he will arrive, and then you can learn more from him than I could find out in a year. Telegraph to him—he is at Tula—to bring all the information he may possess concerning Donnington.”

“An excellent idea!” said Bodiskoff, delighted at a discovery which would seem unimportant to any one but an emissary of the Third Section. “Excellent! Nevertheless, make all inquiries. Ask Kurylowicz; perhaps he knows something of him. Now go, and return directly you have anything to report. Don’t

ever forget that my advancement concerns you deeply, Mosiek," he cried after the Jew as the latter slunk from the room.

On gaining the open air Szluma relieved his feelings by cursing his employer in Hebrew, whilst shaking his fist in the direction of the chamber where his unscrupulous chief sat. A few words are here necessary to explain the confidential relationship existing between two people so seemingly dissimilar as a greasy Jew and the local head of the omnipotent Third Section.

Some twenty years before the opening of this story Bodiskoff, then a subaltern, but already held in high favour by the Third Section, owing to the clever way in which he had discovered and prevented a local rising amongst the Polish peasantry in the neighbourhood of Radom, was stationed in that town. A Jew had been arrested for a crime of unparalleled atrocity, committed under circumstances so revolting that it were shame to record them. The young lieutenant attended the trial from curiosity, and marked the refinement of craft and cruelty with which the deed had been committed, and the marvellous subtlety shown by the prisoner in baffling the queries of his judges and overturning the testimony of the witnesses. The crime was, however, fully brought home to Mosiek

Szluma, and upon conviction he was sentenced to a fate even worse than death—the knout. On hearing his awful doom pronounced all the condemned wretch’s fortitude forsook him, and he was forcibly removed to his cell shrieking, imploring, and calling down imprecations on the heads of his judges. Against mental tension, however severe, his seared conscience was proof; but the dread of bodily pain completely overwhelmed him.

That night the prison was visited by Bodiskoff, and a long interview took place between the convict and himself. The lieutenant, the head of a noble but impoverished family, had his own way to make in the world, and recognised the immense advantage a subordinate so unscrupulous would be in forwarding his prospects; one, moreover, whom he could bind down by the most lasting of earthly obligations—*Fear*.

He found the Jew in an agony of terror and despair, but the senses were acute as ever; and with the first hint of a possible mitigation of his sentence the cool calculating faculties of his race came into play, and he attempted to drive a bargain even in the recovery of his freedom.

But adamant was less hard than Bodiskoff. No compromise could avail the convict. Either he must

surrender himself body and soul to fulfil the behests of his new master, or he must yield up his last breath beneath the furrowing lash of the executioner.

Needless to say that Mosiek acceded to the conditions, and from that hour he had held the position of henchman, spy, go-between, and general accomplice in all the acts of cruelty, oppression, and villainy with which Bodiskoff was mixed up. The latter found little difficulty in inducing the authorities to defer the punishment—mark, *defer*, not *remit*—and a little later, by the same influence, the Jew's prison-door was opened, and he became the Russian's factotum in place of howling away his miserable life from the back of the wooden mare.

Never was human being sold into a state of more cruel servitude. At first he worked desperately in the hope that his patron would reward his exertions by obtaining his pardon; but this would not have suited Bodiskoff's views, who knew well that gratitude was a virtue totally wanting in his tool, and so took care not only to bind him by the sure fetters of fear, but furthermore to render him unquestioningly obedient by menaces of the dungeon and its horrible sequel—threats that the Jew knew to be no idle vapourings, but the steady resolve of an utterly unscrupulous man invested with

the power to perform what he promised. Can it be wondered that Mosiek hated his cruel taskmaster ? both hated and feared him as only a Hebrew can ?

Yet in a curious fashion each man esteemed the other. The Russian recognised and appreciated the cold-blooded nonchalance with which his henchman would plan and discuss a project, however nefarious ; and the Jew admired the tortuous paths by which his master ascended gradually to power, although he would gladly have pushed him into the abyss below, if fear and self-interest had not restrained him.

For the rest—cringing, fawning, lying, cunning, sneaking, dirty—Mosiek Szluma was the type of all that was worst in his oppressed race ; a fit jackal to scent out spoil for such a beast of prey as Bodiskoff. He was also possessed of courage, but of a peculiar kind. No prospective danger intimidated him ; he would at his patron’s bidding mix fearlessly with the members of secret societies, when a knowledge of his real calling would have doomed him to immediate death. Thus he had become affiliated with the Nihilists, and his acting was so consummate that he gained the confidence of several revolutionary leaders. This he did by appearing to betray Bodiskoff’s movements, although the whole plan had been pre-arranged between

master and man. He gave timely warnings of intended raids by the police, and the conspirators looked upon him as a useful member of their society.

Whilst engaged in this base calling the Jew was thoroughly in his element. He took a vindictive pleasure in seeing his fellow-creatures suffer, a delight rather enhanced than decreased by the consciousness that his was the traitorous hand which smote them. There seemed literally nothing human in the man; no cry for mercy could soften him, no tear of agony move him to relenting.

Yet there was a weak spot in this wretch's character; one solitary point existed upon which his feelings could be stirred, and it became evident that even in his breast lurked that "one touch of nature that makes the whole world kin"; this, his sole redeeming point, and one he shared with the very beasts of prey whom he resembled, was passionate love for his only child, his daughter Ryfka. Her he absolutely idolised, though he took good care never to allow this adoration to become known, conscious that therein lay his weakness, that she constituted the sole assailable joint in his harness of egotism and callousness. Though content to envelope his own crouching form in greasy rags, tattered and vermin-haunted, the richest silks from the looms of

Cathay would have seemed too poor for his beloved child. When it was a question of gratifying Ryfka or administering to her pleasure, all prudential motives were cast aside, and the most desperate schemes resorted to for the attainment of the desired end. Such was his love for the girl that he strove to hide from her the nature of his calling, and for this purpose he even submitted to be parted from her, and to place her in a remote Polish village, under the care of an old widowed aunt. Twice a-year he obtained a brief holiday from his task-master—from whom he concealed the girl's very existence—when he hurried off to visit his treasure, to mark with pride her growing beauty, to deck her with fine raiment and costly jewellery, and by a few days spent in her society to recompense himself for his long and enforced absences.

And Ryfka ?

She was a girl just budding into womanhood, with all the oriental beauty of her race, with eyes and hair black as night, and a light, well-proportioned figure, now possessing all the elastic grace of an Eastern *baya-dère*, but threatening to develop too great *embonpoint* with advancing years. She was a superb vision to gaze upon, lovely in her brunette beauty as the houris who people the Mussulman's paradise. And she loved her

father, loved the greasy, fawning Jew whom every one besides despised and hated ; and it is small wonder that he lavished upon her all the tenderness and affection of which he was capable. To see her well married was the dearest wish of his heart, united to one of her own race who was wealthy enough to remove her to another country, far away from the hated Russians and their dreaded Third Section.

Such was the Polish Jew, Mosiek Szluma, the obedient satellite of Count Bodiskoff. In portraying the man we have to a certain extent made known the master's character, which will be further exemplified as the story develops itself.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP.

GEORGE DONNINGTON sat in his office on the morning following his return from Tiraspol. A pile of open letters lay before him, amongst them one from Eva, which gave him cause for grave reflection. For some half-hour he sat silently musing; then took up the letter and carefully re-read it. The contents were as follows :—

“ MY DEAREST GEORGE,

“ Since you last heard from me an event of the utmost importance has occurred—one that I must confess was not wholly unexpected; but one that will, undoubtedly, exercise the greatest influence on my future existence. I have no one to look to for advice but my

brother, and I freely lay bare my heart to you, so that this letter will embody a confession as well as an explanation.

“Perhaps, in my previous communications, I have not dwelt sufficiently on the attention that Lord Haslemere has paid me. I told you of the stag adventure in August last, when our first meeting occurred, and when he saved me and the children from great danger, if not from death. His kindness—his solicitude for my welfare—and the interest he showed in all concerning me, were too marked to be unnoticed by me ; but I regarded them simply as the expression of gratitude for the services which he maintained that I had rendered to his little sisters. You know, George dear, that I am a girl, country-bred, brought up in great seclusion, and that I am ignorant of the manners and customs of the fashionable world. I cannot deny that Lord Haslemere’s attentions pleased me greatly. We accompanied him in his yacht to many places new to me ; and the kindness with which he devoted himself to my service, pointing out and explaining everything of interest, gratified me deeply. His brother, Fulke St. John, who was with us part of the time, treated me quite like a sister ; and, at last—I blush as I commit the avowal, in which, nevertheless, I glory, to paper

—at last, George, I found it impossible to disguise from myself any longer that the liking I always entertained for—(here the letters ‘Char’ were scratched out)—Lord Haslemere had deepened into a warmer feeling.

“Directly I became conscious of this change I endeavoured in every way to avoid his society; but the habits of intimacy which we had gradually assumed made this a matter of much difficulty. My little pretexts were pushed to the winds by the children; Lord Haslemere himself seemed deeply hurt, and I was driven to my wit’s end to know how to act. I should have written to Aunt Emily, but shrank from doing so, as I must then have made an avowal which I felt to be unmaidenly. You were thousands of miles away; what could I do—whom could I consult?

“Yesterday the whole party went to a great festivity on board one of the P. and O. Company’s new vessels at Southampton. I excused myself on the plea of a severe headache, so Mrs. Mansfield took the children, and I was left alone in the house, where I passed a miserable enough forenoon by myself. After a solitary luncheon I was in the large empty drawing-room singing that old favourite of yours, Goethe’s ‘Nähe des Geliebten.’ I do not know what made me select

that song—I never shall know. I was alone, and it came to me irresistibly. I had sung three verses, and had just finished the first two lines of the fourth—you remember them—

“Ich bin bei dir, du seyst auch noch so ferne,
Du bist mir nah !

when a voice—how well I know it!—said quietly,
‘Yes; I am here.’

“What followed I hardly know. My surprise was so great that I had much difficulty in suppressing a scream, and I felt the tell-tale blood rushing to my cheeks, which burnt like fire.

“‘Yes. Here I am, Miss Percival—Eva—and it rests with you to say whether it shall be for ever.’

“George dear, what could I say or do? That I loved him he said he knew—how did he find out, I wonder? I hardly believe this—and had only deserted his party, and hurried back to make sure of the fact. How conceited you men are, George! Shall you say the same thing to the Princess when she turns up?

“George darling, my pen runs riot, and I am writing nonsense instead of the sober matter-of-fact epistle I intended when I sat down. But I am so happy—oh! *so happy*. I seem to walk on air—to be buoyant and inclined to float about the room singing—like those silly little plaster-of-paris cherubs that you see sus-

pended by a wire from the ceiling, with open mouths, chubby cheeks, ridiculous wings, and nothing else particular to speak of.

“And should I be ashamed to feel happy? No, I *am* happy. I know that Charlie loves me, and I love him, oh! so dearly! Yesterday morning, when I watched him drive off in the phaeton with Fulke, I thought I loved him more than any one in this world had ever been loved before. But my feelings then were as ice compared to what they are to-day. I did not sleep a wink last night. Only with the daylight did I drop into a slumber—cried myself to sleep with happiness, in short.

“And fancy, George, Fulke kissed me this morning quite as a matter of course—[the reader will kindly observe that no mention is made by the lady of a similar operation performed by her lover. Oh! a maiden’s heart! Unfathomable, inscrutable!]*]*—and calls me Eva as if he had been intimate with me from my cradle. A dear good fellow Fulke is. It seems that he and Charlie arranged the whole thing beforehand, and if I had not stayed behind Fulke says he would have managed to get Charlie and me locked up in the steamer’s fore-peak—where and what is a fore-peak, I wonder?—or make us miss the last train, or devised

some other desperate means to bring us together. 'My brother is an ass,' he remarked, philosophically, not an hour ago. 'Always was an ass, Eva. I told him to go in and win months ago, when we were at Cherbourg. Didn't I, old man?'

"And so, George dear, I am engaged—or, to speak strictly—shall be engaged, when you have given your consent. Until that arrives I am to stay at Morecambe Park, where Charlie has just gone to explain everything to Aunt Emily. Of course he will be there also. Nothing is to be said to our dear kind old guardian until your approval reaches us, and everything is arranged. Perhaps you will be able to run home and give me away; or, George dearest—an excellent plan!—send your Princess to England, and then we can both be But I am again writing nonsense.

"Charlie has been trying to remember you when you were both at Eton together; but I am afraid he cannot recall your features. When you write—and you will not let a post slip, will you, dear?—tell me all about your school-life over again. Did he not save you from being bullied, or something of the sort? He told me to send every kind message to you, and will write himself in a day or two. Fulke has just asked me to whom I am scribbling, and kindly says that I may add his love,

if it will give the favoured recipient any pleasure. I wonder he did not say 'love and kisses.'

"Now, good-bye for to-day, my darling brother. Try to get leave and come to England, if only for a week ; if not, I shall be obliged to send Charlie out to Odessa in the 'Zephyr,' and that would be cruel, for I cannot spare him for a moment. I feel sure that the news of my great happiness will fill you with joy.

"Ever your fondly loving sister,

"EVA."

Such was the letter over which George sat musing, and his reflections were far from unpleasant. It had always secretly galled him that his sister should have chosen to occupy the position of a dependent after all necessity for such a course had ceased to exist, for with the management at Odessa had come an increase of salary that more than sufficed for his wants, and had enabled him to put a good sum out in very profitable investments. Over and over again he had written asking Eva to accept her aunt's offer of a home, but a steady refusal had always been her reply, accompanied by the suggestion that George should put by every penny for the ultimate redemption of Warham Manor. Now a way had presented itself by which all further trouble would be avoided. His only

sister would marry a man she dearly loved—that was amply evidenced by her letter—one who would place her in the social position that she was entitled to fill; and one, moreover, whom George had every reason to believe was an honourable, good man who would render her future very happy. He would write at once cordially congratulating her and giving his unqualified consent to the engagement.

He had just finished and directed his letter when the chief clerk entered and announced that a gentleman was outside waiting to see him, “He has called here several times already, sir,” he added, “but would not tell me his business. He wanted the manager, he said.”

“Well, show him in. By-the-bye, what is his name?”

“He has given none, sir. Shall I ask him?”

“No; show him in. I shall soon find out.”

The clerk ushered in a man clad in a grey tweed suit that had evidently seen much service; a man with a full brown beard and moustache that wholly concealed the lower part of his face, leaving only the sunburned cheeks and frank blue Saxon eyes visible. His manner was quiet and self-possessed as he explained his business in a few words.

“I am an Englishman, a civil engineer, and arrived

in Odessa some six months ago to establish certain water-works for an English company. I have surveyed the ground and find that the directors must have been wholly misinformed, and that operations such as they had in contemplation are entirely out of the question. Either gross misrepresentations have been made, or singular ignorance displayed ; for the scheme, although fair enough upon paper, is practically impossible. Three months ago I reported to that effect, forwarding plans which were convincing proof of the impracticable nature of the task they wished to carry out. Since then I have received no line from them—neither instructions, remittances, or letter of recall. I cannot help suspecting that the company was a bubble one, which has already burst, and that the shareholders will save little from the wreck. However, I have not come here to trouble you with my speculations on this subject. The truth is that my funds are exhausted and that I am in great difficulty, therefore, I have come to you as a countryman to ask if you can find me any employment that will keep the wolf from the door until I can ascertain something definite concerning the company that sent me here.”

Donnington had been closely scrutinizing the face of the applicant during his explanation, and racking

his brain to think where he had before heard a voice whose tones seemed familiar to him. How often the memory of a face haunts us and yet persistently evades our strenuous efforts to assign the time or locality where it was first seen. Such was the case now. That George had before met the stranger he felt certain, but memory refusing to render him any assistance, and his companion betraying no sort of recognition of himself, the young man was compelled to ask his name as affording the best clue to the mystery.

“My name? Oh, yes, I quite forgot to mention it—Arthur Middleton, civil engi —”

But in a moment George had grasped his visitor by the hand, while the whole scene by the Yore came rushing back—the wild overflow of the waters—the swirling eddies—the entangling trees—the horrible feeling of failing strength and helplessness—the cheery shout of encouragement—the saving plank—the gallant rescue—the farm-house parlour—the meeting between the brother and sister and the preserver of the former—all hurried tumultuously through his brain at the words “Arthur Middleton.” How could he possibly have failed to recognise the man who had saved his life?

“Do you not remember me?” he cried, excitedly,

wringing the brown hand of the fisherman. "Have you forgotten the freshet in the Yore at the falls, and the man you so gallantly pulled out? Well, it was me—me, George Donnington. Ah! I see you begin to know me now. Thank God for the chance that led you here."

Middleton had at first, not unnaturally, been possessed with the idea that the manager of the house of Bonham had either made a mistake or that he was suffering from temporary aberration of intellect, but George's concluding words cleared up the mystery, and the meeting between the two men was most cordial. After many questions, replies, and mutual explanations, Donnington asked where his friend was staying.

"At the *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs*," said Arthur. "But I am afraid that they won't keep me there much longer. The proprietor pulled a very long face when I told him I must receive remittances from London before settling his bill."

"We will go together and square him up," said George, thoroughly delighted at the opportunity afforded of requiting his debt of gratitude in even so small a manner, "and we will have your traps removed to my house. You must be my guest—a most welcome one, I assure you—until we look about us and see what

can be done. Nay, I can take no refusal," he added, seeing that Middleton was about to protest. "I have abundance of room, and it will be a real pleasure to talk over the turns and bends of the river in old Wensleydale."

So the landlord of the *Hôtel des Ambassadeurs* had his heart gladdened by the settlement of an extortionate bill, without question, and Arthur Middleton took up his abode with George Donnington, where both young men speedily became fast friends.

"Have you heard the news?" asked George, on returning home to dinner one evening about a month after he and Arthur had first met. "A new governor is appointed, General von Fahlenberg. He is, I am told, charged with a special mission to suppress the Nihilists, who are supposed to muster pretty strong in this part. Old Naryschkin, the present man—and a genial good fellow he is!—is rather in disgrace for his leniency. The Czar's *entourage* have got a fresh scare since that girl Bertha Nikitsky shot Berstel, and repressive measures are to be actively instituted throughout the empire."

"Well, it won't make any difference to us," said Arthur. "As for Berstel, from all I can hear, shooting was too good for him. He ordered Bertha's father to

be tortured, or something of that kind, did he not? She is a fine girl, Donnington; I admire her pluck. If there were more like her the officials would exercise a little more humanity to untried prisoners."

"You are talking the purest nihilism," said George, smiling, "and if Count Bodiskoff heard you the *gens-d'armes* would be hammering at my door before daylight to-morrow. The Nihilists never did me either harm or good," he continued, "so it is indifferent to me whether they are rooted out or left alone; but the arrival of a new Governor is a very different thing. It will fill the town, for all the nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood will come in to pay their respects, and to show their loyalty to the Emperor's representative. Any one who stopped away on such an occasion would, I am told, be suspected of disaffection."

"Yes, I see," returned Arthur with a smile and a quiet twinkle in his eye. "And amongst the arrivals on this noteworthy occasion will be Prince Soudakoff and a certain young lady—his ward. Eh, George?"

"I suppose so," returned Donnington, in a tone to which he endeavoured to impart the utmost carelessness, but to which his rising colour gave the lie direct. "Did you hear anything from England?" he asked, abruptly turning the subject.

"Yes, but I had not intended to bother you with it to-night. I have received letters which fully confirm my worst anticipations. The water-works company was a gross swindle, the originators of which have judiciously decamped, leaving their wretched victims—of which I may, in a certain sense, be considered as one—to struggle out of the business as best they can. Not a penny have they forwarded to me; for all such scoundrels care I may starve in a foreign land."

"I am half glad to hear it, old fellow," said George, cheerfully. "Now we shall manage to keep you here. You must take a stool in my office until something better turns up—that is to say, if you still insist upon working."

"You are a good fellow, Donnington," said Arthur, much moved, "but quill-driving would soon make an end of me. I am totally unfitted for it. Now anything that had to do with machinery I could manage easily enough, whether indoors or outdoors, town or country, as the advertisements say. Some berth on the railway or telegraph, for instance. Any means, in short, by which I could gain money sufficient to discharge my few debts and pay the passage to England."

"Well, we will see," said George. "Meanwhile,

don't trouble your head about what cannot be helped. Come, here is dinner."

Again and again had Donnington pressed upon his friend the sum necessary to take him home comfortably, but the idea of being beholden even to one with whom he stood upon such intimate terms was so distasteful to Middleton that Donnington had long since given up recurring to the subject. The best way to advance his aims seemed to be to find him some suitable employment, and with this object in view the young man, on the following morning, went to the bureau of the railway and telegraph department, the chief of which establishment was known to him.

"Humph! An Englishman!" said that official, when George had explained the reason of his visit. "You British are, as a rule, too independent to suit us. Ah! your *protégé* is of quite a different stamp, you will answer. That is what I was given to understand of a countryman of yours whom I put in charge of the locomotives at Nicolaiev. He was quiet as a lamb, I was told. Well, if all your English lambs resemble this Thomson, I would sooner be set to shepherd a flock of wolves. General D—— just touched him with his cane, and in a moment your British lamb had knocked him down, and both his aides-de-camp to boot.

I dismissed him, of course, but he made such an outcry about breach of contract, and so on, that I was glad to get rid of him by the payment of a good round sum. Your friend does not resemble this Thomson, I trust?"

"Not in the least," replied George, smiling, despite himself, at the recital of his countryman's prowess.

"And does he understand the telegraph?"

"Thoroughly."

"Well, we want a superintendent at Tiraspol. The position is not one of any great importance or emolument, but if he gets on there it may lead to better things. If your friend likes it he can come here, and I will make out his appointment at once."

Arthur Middleton was glad enough to take even so subordinate a position as this, and, the whole matter being settled in twenty-four hours, he started for his new post, where his presence was urgently needed, accompanied by George, who wished to see his friend comfortably settled, and also to visit the Soudakoffs.

On reaching the château he was shocked to find the Prince suffering from all the tortures of rheumatic gout, and completely prostrated. Added to the pain of such a visitation was deep regret at the untoward moment the malady had chosen for manifesting itself, for in a few days the new Governor would reach Odessa, and he

knew in what a sinister light his absence on such an occasion would be viewed. The Prince was aware that his proceedings were looked upon with distrust by the authorities, who entertained an inexplicable suspicion of both himself and his motives. General von Fahlenberg's horror and detestation of everything that savoured of socialism was well known; indeed, the unrelenting vigour with which he had pursued the revolutionists had caused his present appointment; and on this account the Prince would have sacrificed much to allay all suspicions and tie all calumnious tongues by an appearance at the levée. Only one thing remained to be done,—to send the Princess and Yanina down to Odessa to represent him at the coming ceremony, when the former could explain to the new Governor the cause of her husband's absence.

CHAPTER XI.

INTRIGUE.

COUNT BODISKOFF was in his office when the Jew, Mosiek Szluma, was announced as wishing an audience, and at once gained admission to his patron's presence. His demeanour was cringing as ever, and his dress a trifle more unsavoury than usual.

"Don't stand wringing your greasy hands," cried the Count, brutally, "but say at once whether Barek Gold will advance the sum I require."

"Barek is poor, Excellency, poor as Hiob when the hand of God visited him most sorely. He has lent out much amongst the Gentiles, and alas! they pay him not back."

"But he takes good care to pay himself, usurious Jew dog that he is," sneered Bodiskoff. "Did he not foreclose on young Gouroff last week, despite his entreaties for a short delay, and the foolish lad blew his own brains out instead of those of his bloodsucking creditor. Now look here, Mosiek," and the Count's tone became hard and imperious, "this sort of work won't suit me, and you ought to know it by this time. Am I to have the money or not?"

"Holy Abraham!" returned Szluma, "Barek swears by the Tabernacle that he has it not. He might scrape up a thousand roubles by borrowing of all his friends; more he vows he cannot do."

"Very good," said Bodiskoff, quietly. "Then I shall get it in *my* way. What do you do with your own money, Mosiek? Are you married, and do you maintain a small family of young Israelites made in your own pleasing image?"

"It pleases the Excellency to have his jest with his servant," said the Jew, attempting to prevent the uneasiness under which he laboured from becoming visible to his lynx-eyed interrogator. "No maiden of our tribes would mate with poor broken-down old Mosiek."

"Notwithstanding the charming notoriety he gained at Radom, eh, Mosiek?"

The wretched Hebrew quaked at this terrible bantering, but his ruthless employer saw that he had, by purest accident as it happened, hit upon some assailable point, and followed up his advantage unmercifully.

"Where do you spend those absences that occur twice every year? Something whispers to me that family affection has much to do with them. Come, be candid with an old friend, Mosiek."

"I go to lay out my small moneys, Excellency," returned the Jew, resolved to part with his dearly beloved gold sooner than run any risk of Ryfka's existence coming to his master's ear.

Bodiskoff was far too shrewd to believe this; he knew his satellite's nature too well, but he affected to credit it, and pounced like a hawk upon the opportunity offered him.

"Then if Barek Gold cannot scrape up ten thousand roubles doubtless you can. I will give you sound security and also put you in the way of gaining more in consideration of this good turn. Is it agreed?"

Love for his daughter and love for wealth struggled in the breast of the miserable Jew, but affection for his offspring carried the day, and he signified by a mute gesture that his tyrant's will should be complied with, registering inwardly a vow of vengeance against

Barek Gold and against his employer should an opportunity for performing the same ever present itself.

“And now, Mosiek, that this trifling business has been so satisfactorily settled—ah! you are a sly dog! I must have the money within the month, remember!—Now that your valuable assistance, so considerably proffered, has removed all pecuniary difficulties from my path, let me hear what you have found out about young Donnington,” and the *roué* stretched himself comfortably in his easy chair, with the air of a man at peace with himself and with all his surroundings.

“Kurylowicz was well acquainted with him in London, and hates him bitterly,” replied the Jew, when he had swallowed his chagrin. “He first met him at a revolutionary gathering, to which Donnington was introduced by Mathias Schimkow, or Count Ralowski, as he then called himself. Have you not telegraphed or written to Schimkow?”

“Yes; but he has been sent on business to Warsaw, and will not arrive here for a few days.”

“Kurylowicz will serve the Excellency’s turn if any testimony against the young man is required,” whispered Mosiek, half forgetting his own troubles in the enjoyment of seeing the spider’s net closing round

another fly—one, moreover, from whom he thought that money might be extracted.

“What makes you suppose I want him arrested?” asked Bodiskoff, half-amused, for as yet he had no fixed intention of injuring George.

“The Excellency’s kind inquiries generally end in the casemates for their object,” grinned Szluma.

“For shame!” laughed the Count, who regarded the speech as more than half a compliment. “We will wait till Schimkow arrives. Never to do anything in a hurry except catch fleas is a praiseworthy old saying. Besides, the young man is my friend.”

“The devil is generally found lurking behind the cross,” thought Szluma, “and my master’s friendship is dangerous.” Aloud he said, “The Englishman is rich, Excellency—commands the credit of a well-known house—would he not advance the money?” and the Jew’s voice sank to a wheedling whisper.

“Not a rouble,” returned his chief; “not a copeck. I have tried and failed.”

This was a fabrication, but Alexis Bodiskoff was not bound down by a too rigid adherence to truth when diplomacy demanded a lie.

“No; you must have the sum forthcoming,” he continued. “If you can squeeze anything out of the

hound Barek, do so, and make any use of my name you like. Ah! what is this?" as a messenger entered the cabinet with a telegram. "Remain here," he cried to Mosiek, who was endeavouring to sneak out with the orderly. "Remain here and shut the door. How cursedly hard this cypher is to make out! Mosiek," he said, abruptly, when he had made the message out to his satisfaction, "you must go to Tiraspol this afternoon. No reply; these are your orders. A Nihilist meeting is to be held there tomorrow, which you must attend"—the Jew's face blanched through its mask of grime—"and bring me a list of the most active conspirators. Now, mark me," here his tone became slow and emphatic; "if your craft can mix up Prince Soudakoff with these revolutionists; if a colourable case can be brought against him—one that will justify immediate action—you shall receive back at once the ten thousand roubles I am borrowing, and half that sum in addition by way of interest. Do you understand?"

The Jew bowed in assent, and greed sparkled in his cunning eyes as he replied, "Mosiek understands, Excellency; but if you would have the lamp burn brightly you must feed it with oil."

"Begone and find the means yourself," cried the

colonel, half rising from his chair in wrath at this demand for money. "Begone, and do your business well, then you shall receive your reward."

The Jew, terrified, sidled out of the room, leaving his patron to weave further schemes for his own advancement, and took the train for Tiraspol. Arrived at his destination his first inquiries were concerning Prince Soudakoff, and he was thrown into an agony of despair on finding that this nobleman was a victim to a severe attack of gout, which confined him to his bed, and would certainly keep him a prisoner in the château for many weeks. He also learnt that the Princess and the Countess Bromirska were to leave for Odessa on the following morning, all of which information he forwarded to Count Bodiskoff through the telegraph, and then repaired to the house of one of his co-religionists, where he passed the night tossing sleeplessly on his pallet and cursing the untoward illness which effectually prevented his accusing the unconscious Prince of any participation in the Nihilist gathering. All the little plans that he had prepared were frustrated by this unexpected event, and he now feared that there would be no chance of keeping his money from the clutch of his dreaded employer. Still, something might yet turn up, and he determined to visit

the Nihilist meeting, where he could surely make an honest penny by betraying some of the members or divulging their secrets. By spying into his neighbours' affairs Mosiek had often acquired lucrative information, and his was not the nature to sit down and idly bewail a loss. His active mind was always pursuing wealth, and he had long since recognised the truth of that old saying that "Victory is not gained by idleness."

It was between eleven o'clock and noon. In the small, low-ceilinged, dingy front apartment of an obscure tavern, access to which was obtained by descending a flight of rickety wooden steps, might be seen some twenty persons seated at the little round tables with which the room was furnished. The members of the various groups were talking lowly and earnestly, intermitting their conversation to look up whenever the closing of the swing-door announced the entry of another visitor, and resuming again when a glance had assured them that the new-comer was a friend. They were of all types; the artisan was there, distinguishable by his toil-worn and knotted hands; the student in threadbare garments and with pale cheeks, lighted up by intelligent eyes; the well-to-do tradesman or merchant in good stout broadcloth; more than one Jew—our friend Mosiek Szluma amongst the

number—in greasy robes and with features half hidden by the scattered elf-locks ; all classes, with two exceptions. There were none whose dress betokened that they belonged to the upper-class, the Tschin, or, if so, they were disguised ; and the peasants had no representative. Dirty, stained cloths covered the tables upon which stood the refreshment with which each man was provided, in most cases tea, a beverage of which all Russians are inordinately fond ; although several were furnished with plates of suspicious-looking cabbage-soup, flanked by glasses of water, neither clear nor enticing ; and in one instance four friends shared between them a bottle of thin sour wine.

Mosiek, whilst talking to another Hebrew acquaintance and playing with the cup of tea before him, kept his eyes furtively fixed upon a door situated at the end of the apartment and apparently leading to another room. Nearly forty people were by this time assembled and the little tables were completely crowded, yet the conversation was conducted in so low a tone that the sharpest ear could have distinguished little to carry away.

Suddenly the above-mentioned door was thrown open and a dead silence reigned throughout the apartment as three men entered, whose dress indicated that they

belonged to the better class of artisans. The foremost of the trio, a bold, determined-looking young man, whose closely-shaven face allowed the square resolute jaw to become fully visible, threw a hasty but searching glance round, and then, turning to his companions, said, in a somewhat louder voice than the proximity of the persons addressed demanded, "This evening, then, we will bring the chess contest to a close. At half-past seven remember, in Anton Petrovitch's work-shop. Until then, good-bye." And the speaker, rapidly traversing the room, gained the street by means of the swing-door and steps; whither he was soon followed by the remaining guests, so that within half-an-hour Mosiek Szluma was the sole occupant of the unsavoury, smoke-laden chamber.

Immediately on perceiving that he was alone the Jew arose, passed into the inner room without knocking at the door, and finding it, as he had expected, to be empty, approached a side wall, wherein was an opening, apparently for the purpose of supplying customers with refreshment, but which was now closed with a sliding-sash of good solid oak. Upon this, after carefully shutting the door behind him, Mosiek knocked three times, gently and at measured intervals, after which he paused and listened attentively, a pleased

expression passing over his face on hearing a similar signal given in reply. Again he rapped, but in an irregular manner—two blows in quick succession, a pause, then three blows more slowly. Before the sound of the last died away the sash had been slowly withdrawn, and a head appeared, evidently the property of a Hebrew, and one who seemed more surprised than pleased on recognising his visitor, if the scowl that knitted his shaggy overhanging eyebrows could be taken as any index of the thoughts passing within.

“Holy Abraham! Is it thou, Mosiek Jacobovitch?” cried the proprietor of the tavern, for such was the position filled by this worthy. “I did not expect thee. Come in quickly out of the sight of these Gentile dogs, should any of them be prowling about,” and, opening a secret panel, he half dragged his visitor in, and carefully closed both this novel means of entry and the sliding-sash, before venturing on another word. The seclusion that he deemed necessary having been obtained, he continued :

“Sit down, Mosiek. Here we are safe from disturbance. Thou hast not come to ask me for money? The blessed Patriarchs can bear me witness that I lose rather than gain in this unhallowed hole.”

"I have not come for that; on the contrary, I hope to put roubles into thy purse if all goes well."

"Mayest thou be rewarded!" cried Nathan Nathanovitch, all anxiety disappearing, and joy lighting up his hangdog countenance. "May thy daughter be tall and stately as the cedar of Lebanon; may thy goods multiply and thy flocks increase until . . ."

"Spare thy breath, Nathan Nathanovitch," broke in Mosiek, who had small belief in the efficacy of any human being's benedictions, particularly when their utterer was a man of the innkeeper's stamp. "Blessings never brought a dead donkey to life, so reserve them for those who value them. Who was the young man that appointed the time for the meeting this evening—him with a small moustache and resolute face? I have never seen him before."

"That was Ivan Ivanovitch, a delegate despatched by the head-centre at Moscow to preach the cause in Southern Russia, and to kindle the enthusiasm of the members. But what brings thee here, Mosiek? Has the unclean dog, Bodiskoff, sent thee to run thy head again into this hornet's nest?"

"Malediction on him, yes," returned Szluma, his eyes flashing as the name of his hated master was mentioned.

"Thy life is too precious, Mosiek," continued Nathan, "too valuable to us all to be imperilled thus in the service of the Gentile. Only at thy bidding has Ryfka, the Rose of Poland, consented to bestow her peerless hand on my Schmuld; and should aught befall thee she will assuredly withdraw her promise."

"Fear nothing. We shall both live to see Schmuld and Ryfka blessed by the Rabbi, and to nurse their children. But the conditions, friend Nathan—remember the accompanying conditions. Does the hoard mount up, and wilt thou soon be able to pay down the hundred thousand silver—not paper—roubles that I demand for my daughter's hand? Do not imagine that she will come to Schmuld undowered; and these foolish people calling themselves Nihilists should, if properly treated, fill thy coffers. Was it five or seven thousand roubles that thou receivedst for letting that little secret about Ulric Jatnikoff become known to the Third Section? Poor young man, your indiscretion cost him his life, Nathan! He expired before the third thousand of the blows to which he was sentenced was completed, did he not? Tush! man, never look frightened; no one can learn our little secrets in this snug den of thine."

The old innkeeper had cowered before the words of

his companion, and now pressed his hand to his mouth in an agony of fear, while murmuring, "Hush, hush! Mosiek! For the sake of God, hush! Walls have ears, and fields eyes. If any suspicion arose of my being implicated in that transaction, I were a dead man. Look at the danger I incur and say nothing."

"Danger!" sneered Mosiek, much the bolder villain of the two. "Danger! And dost thou think, Nathan Nathanovitch, that I stand in no peril?—that I am exempted from all danger? Would'st thou dare one-tenth of the risk that I incur hourly? Would'st thou have the nerve to venture into the midst of these rabid revolutionists—to gain their confidence—become their agent and apparent tool—walk perpetually on a volcano that a breath of suspicion would cause to break forth and overwhelm thee? Would'st thou have the courage to plan and execute deeds, which, if known, would awaken the hatred of ten thousand desperate men, and cause as many daggers to be sharpened to find a sheath between thy fleshless ribs? Pah! The risk thou runnest is small compared to mine, and yet thou cowerest down, shivering with terror, like a whipped hound. Now let us hear no more rubbish of this nature, but tell me all thou knowest concerning this Ivan Ivanovitch."

"I have heard one thing about him that would fill the pockets of an enterprising man with roubles," returned Nathan, doggedly. He feared his accomplice, but deeply resented the tone adopted by him.

"Speak it at once," cried the bolder villain, imperiously. "Disguise naught from me, or thy share in Ulric Jatnikoff's. . . ."

"Mercy, Mosiek, mercy!" implored the wretched innkeeper. "Keep that name from thy lips, and I will tell thee all. Would that I had held my hands clean from that business! His shrieks ring in my ears at night, and I see him as he lay bound upon the hurdle, the froth on his lips, and his mangled flesh crimsoning the winter snow! God of Abraham! what a doom for one so strong, so active, so full of life?" and the old traitor shuddered.

"Pshaw!" sneered Mosiek. "Thou art becoming imbecile. Does the death of a Gentile thus affect thee? Then must I seek some less impressionable associate."

"No, no," pleaded Nathan, who feared the lengths to which his accomplice might go. "It was but a momentary weakness. The youth had been sheltered by me for months, had eaten at my board, and drank of my cup; had nursed me tenderly through a long

illness. Ah ! he was a clever doctor ! That alone it is which makes me regret him."

"Now thou talkest sensibly," cried Mosiek, approvingly. "Were all the Christian dogs scourged to death it would rid the earth of much living rubbish. But about this Ivan ?"

The innkeeper glanced furtively around, and then, putting his mouth close to his companion's ear, whispered, "Ivan Ivanovitch is not his true name. He is Wladimir Nikitsky, brother to Bertha, the girl who shot General Berstel."

"And he dares to venture here !" murmured Szluma, in amazement. "Here, under the very eyes of such a man as Bodiskoff, and at the time when a new Governor, notorious for his hatred of Socialism, is hourly expected ! Art thou sure that this information is reliable, Nathan ?"

"It is true—true as the holy Talmud. And, Mosiek, my brother," he added, fawningly, "if the Third Section should think fit to arrest this Ivan, poor old Nathan Nathanovitch will get his share of the reward."

"Then thou art ready to risk his troubling thy repose at night with shrieks and such nonsense. Yes, rest assured that thou shalt not go unrewarded. But I must think over this. It gives a double reason that I should

attend the meeting to-night. Thou also must be there, prepared to support me. Dost hear, Nathan? Let me out now; I must ponder over the best way of turning this information to account. I will call again at six o'clock, and we will go to the gathering together."

Whilst the events described above were taking place, the Princess Soudakoff and Yanina Bromirska were speeding towards Odessa, the elder lady furnished with a letter from her husband to General von Fahlenberg, which she was to present in person, at the same time apologizing for the Prince's unavoidable absence. It will be remembered that their projected journey had been made known by Mosiek Szluma to Count Bodiskoff; and scarcely had the ladies alighted from the carriage at Odessa than that officer advanced along the platform, saluted them most cordially, and proffered his escort to their hotel, professing much happiness that the accident which led to his presence in the station had procured him so great an honour. The deep bow with which he emphasized this polite speech, together with the glance that shot from his light-grey eyes towards Yanina, filled that young lady with horror and apprehension, but the Princess, who knew nothing of the man's real character, was delighted at having so powerful a protector, and babbled on during the

entire drive, asking questions concerning the new Governor and the coming festivities, whilst ever and again lamenting the accident that would prevent the Prince from being present at the *levée*.

"I shall see the General at the ball and then I can give him the letter; though how I shall ever accomplish this in such a crowd without tearing my dress to tatters, I cannot imagine. I shall look to you for help, Count," she continued, cheerfully, unconscious of the kicks with which Yanina was endeavouring to stop the current of her prattle.

"You honour me, Princess," returned Bodiskoff, with his blandest smile, and delighted at the turn affairs were taking; "but I flatter myself you could have applied to no one better able to assist you in this case. I shall see the General immediately on his arrival, and from my official position shall be in constant communication with him. If you thought fit to entrust me with poor Soudakoff's letter—how I regret to hear of his malady!—I would not only deliver it at the earliest opportunity, and thus spare you much trouble, but would also take care to impress upon the Governor how grievous the Prince's absence was, both to himself and to his charming wife."

Alexis Bodiskoff, if not handsome, was possessed of

a polished and gentlemanly bearing, and his manner—when it suited his purpose—could be highly ingratiating. In a country like Russia, where official position counts for everything, where military rank takes precedence of all civil position, and where insolence clad in uniform may freely cuff and kick modest merit habited in broadcloth or sheepskins; in a condition of society so constituted, such an offer as the above could only be regarded as most kind and thoughtful; so, heedless of a whole tornado of kicks covertly rained upon her by Yanina, the Princess replied that she would accept the offer with much gratitude, and was proceeding to extract the missive from its place of concealment when her young companion, who had not as yet broken silence, and who had good reason to view Bodiskoff's every movement with suspicion, suddenly interfered, saying in a tone of remonstrance, "But, mamma dear, do you not remember that it was papa's particular wish that you should deliver the letter with your own hand?"

"You should not meddle in business matters that you cannot possibly understand, Yanina," rejoined the lady, with mild dignity, as she noticed the raised eyebrows and the half-amused, half-sarcastic smile with which the Count listened to this little protest. "Your

papa did not for a moment dream that we should find, immediately on arrival, so able an advocate as Count Bodiskoff. This is the letter, dear Count," she continued, handing over the missive to that gentleman, who received it with every outward manifestation of deference. "It is most truly kind of you—but here we are at the hotel. You won't come in and have some tea? No? Well, good-bye, and at the ball on Thursday you shall tell me how the Governor received the letter. Good-bye, and again a thousand thanks," and the Count, having assisted the Princess to alight—Yanina sprang lightly from the carriage, scorning the proffered hand—took his departure, by no means dissatisfied with his work so far.

On reaching his quarters Bodiskoff immediately summoned one of his subordinates, an emissary of the Third Section.

"You have placed one of our fellows in the Hôtel Soudakoff?" he asked, directly the man appeared.

"Yes, Excellency—Michael Bernolak."

"Is he your best man?"

"Our very best. A cat could not creep past him in the dark unseen, or a spider shake its web unheard."

"Good. Let him be cautioned that no telegrams are to reach the Princess, and that every conversation she

holds is to be immediately reported to me. If he does his duty in this matter faithfully and well, he shall be recommended for a higher grade; but if not—if any single incident of value escapes his notice—let him look that his skin be hard, for his back shall make acquaintance with the *plète* (rod). The *trous-de-Judas* are in good order?”

“Our carpenter saw to them last week, Excellency, as you directed. He obtained admission to the house disguised as a plumber. There is now no single room in the Hôtel Soudakoff into which Michael cannot see, and no conversation can be held, in however low a tone, which he cannot overhear.”

The police-officer made this last abominable announcement with an air of conscious pride, and, on receiving a satisfied nod from his chief, withdrew.

Left to himself Bodiskoff produced the Prince's letter to General von Fahlenberg, tore it open without ceremony, mastered its contents, and then, after half-an-hour of deep reflection, during which time he strode slowly up and down the apartment, having resumed his seat he wrote a lengthy telegram in cypher, which in due course reached the chief of the Third Section at St. Petersburg.

“Well,” he muttered, as, after kindling a match, he

watched the hapless Prince's letter reduced to tinder, "well, so far so good. That telegram will pave the way for the report that I shall send in after the *levée*. When you leave your bed, Soudakoff *mon ami*, it rather strikes me that it will not be to wallow in the flesh-pots of Odessa, or to build factories for the amelioration of the beastly peasants, but to eat the rye-bread of affliction in the salubrious but somewhat barren and wintry district of Archangel. That will knock all Quixotic notions out of your head, whilst, with only the cackling old goose of a Princess to look after her, that little Polish minx will be completely at my mercy."

After indulging in several amiable and gratifying reflections of a similar nature, Count Bodiskoff lighted a cigar and strolled down to the English Club, there to dine, and afterwards to wind up the evening with a little modest baccarat.

CHAPTER XII.

WITH THE NIHILISTS.

IN the outskirts of Tiraspol, surrounded by a garden of considerable size, stands the house and workshop of Anton Petrovitch, who is a printer on a small scale—a very small scale indeed, if his worth be estimated by the number of folios that go forth from his press. Tiraspol is not a town of any extent or importance, and, until it became thrust into prominence by the junction of two great lines of railway in its vicinity, its very existence had probably been unknown to the great majority of Russians. Such a place was not likely to possess or require a literature of its own, and with the pulling-off of a few bills and advertisements the machinery appeared to have met all the demands of

the neighbourhood. How Anton Petrovitch lived, and paid the two journeymen in his employ, would have puzzled the good people of Tiraspol had they thought deeply on the subject ; but in truth intellectual activity was rarely awakened in the little place, the inhabitants of which—very Gallios—cared little for most things, and reflected profoundly on none that lay beyond the sphere of their own personal interest.

Still the printer seemed to exist comfortably enough and his machinery was heard clanking merrily at times, though no great Russian standard work could be discovered bearing the impress of his establishment.

The wooden gate by which the garden surrounding the house was entered remained swung back on its hinges on the evening in question, and visitors of both sexes, in small parties of twos and threes, were dropping in and making their way to the workshop at the rear, a spacious barn-like building, comprising one single room, occupied by the printing-presses and their necessary adjuncts.

Amongst the arrivals are Mosiek Szluma and Nathan the innkeeper, and in the company already assembled the former recognised most of the faces he had seen at the tavern earlier in the day. The women, mostly under twenty-five years of age, some mere girls, were

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at the first glance undistinguishable from the men, for their hair was cut short; the majority wore spectacles of blue or neutral tint, which concealed the eyes; long dark cloaks shrouded their forms; their gait was awkward and ungainly, as though they were imitating the movements of the sterner sex; no little decoration—no flower in the hat, no scrap of coloured kerchief or ribbon—betrayed the feminine instinct; their garb was dull, sombre, and unattractive, their faces fixed and resolute, wholly devoid of womanly grace or softness. Yet many of these young girls were of noble family, had been cradled in every luxury, were still rich in worldly possessions. Surely, something must be very faulty in the government of a country when all the thinking power of the rising generation is driven to such expedients to secure the one desired end—liberty of thought and action.

The company disposed themselves as best they could, sitting or lounging on the chests and benches. Some few spoke together in whispered tones; but the greater number, with knitted brows and compressed lips, seemed sunk in meditation. From time to time eyes were raised anxiously towards the clock on the wall; then the half after seven struck, and before the clear note had died away the same three men whom we

have seen before at the tavern entered—Ivan Ivanovitch a little in advance of his companions, who carried with them a chessboard and pieces. These they set in order and then played a few moves amidst breathless silence: after which Ivan arose and spoke in a low but distinct voice, that reached to every corner of the apartment:—

“Brothers,—We are assembled here ostensibly to witness a contest at chess, but in reality with a far different object. Shame on the laws of a country that drive peaceful citizens to subterfuge for the means of ventilating opinions, which should be free as air! I see before me now representatives of all classes in the Empire, except the peasant. Nor do I wonder at his absence. As a serf he was incapable of receiving new ideas, as emancipated he is incapable of grasping them. Yet the time is not far distant when the peasantry will join us. They are learning to be discontented with their lot, the leaven of disaffection is working amongst them; they begin to see dimly that they are not mere brute beasts, but should be admitted to some of the freedom enjoyed by all surrounding nations as a prescriptive right. It is our bounden duty to further this good work—to sow discord between the agriculturist and his employer.”

“ All who are here present are pledged to assist in bringing about a revolution. Ignorant people accredit us with seeking to destroy all existing institutions. They say that our aim is solely destructive ; that we would pull down the monarchy, root up religion, sweep away at one swoop administrations, armies, priests, judges, and the monopolists of privileges. Those who say this traduce us. Herzen promulgated the theory that a constitution was only a miserable contract between masters and slaves ; but in this our great teacher was wrong. No sane man if called upon to improve an edifice would begin his work by pulling down the entire fabric and raising another on the ruins. He would rather content himself with removing the weak or objectionable portions, and substituting that which was more suitable and commodious in its place. So with us : we would not lay the axe to the root of the social tree, we would prune it only—by judicious lopping thin out all decaying branches, and mercilessly excise the parasites that cumber its frame and batten on the destruction they bring. We have no cause of complaint against the Emperor. We believe—nay, we know—him to be a man anxious to ameliorate the condition of his people. It is those surrounding him who are our enemies : that Reactionary party that is ever

at work seeking to minimise the advantages that may accrue to the masses from the ruler's more generous instincts; that small *clique* of interested men who strive to raise suspicion in a noble breast, who misrepresent the people to their master, declaring them to be ungrateful for past favours and eternally plotting for fresh and larger concessions. No, the Emperor is well-meaning enough: it is with those who surround him that we are bound to declare war—war to the knife.

“Brothers, orders have been recently issued by the Government directing that the laws against all such as, like ourselves, are struggling for freedom shall be administered with merciless severity. We all know what this means. It signifies homes ruthlessly invaded by the minions of despotism—sons torn from their fathers—daughters dragged from their mothers—incarceration within walls where pestilence stalks—condemnation on false evidence. This is what ‘vigorous repression’ means, and we must be prepared to meet it. To give you fresh courage and resolution is my mission, and I have undertaken the duty cheerfully, because in Southern Russia we have ever found men with heads to plan skilfully and hands to strike boldly. I need not recapitulate the terrible abuses, the cruelty and injustice, which have arrayed us against the existing

order of things and forced us to become conspirators. In any other country we should be holding this meeting in public, reporters would take down the speeches delivered, and before breakfast on the following morning Europe would be in possession of every word uttered. Here we must hide our heads and must speak at the peril of our lives and liberties. Every man and woman here present has subscribed the articles of our Ritual, and each one either has, or is prepared to, sacrifice everything for the sake of the Holy Cause. Neither affection, passion, self-interest, or individuality are allowed to interfere when the great principle is in question. We have vowed to obey blindly, unhesitatingly, unscrupulously. Now a revolutionist to become great and powerful must clearly discern the objects he has it in view to attain; and, having recognised them, he must fix his aim solely on these to the exclusion of all other matters—must make his way towards the desired end fearlessly and mercilessly, resolutely trampling down all objects that may intervene, though it may involve the crushing of affection, the rupture of the ties of kindred or consanguinity, and the smothering of personal interest. Hard terms, are they not? Think, then, of the injustice that must have been committed to call forth such renunciation.

“Our end—our aim—our life-long struggle is to attain liberty of thought; the right to express our feelings without let or hindrance; and this can only be gained by sweeping away the vast network of official corruption in which this unhappy land lies enfolded. This slough of corruption is the cause of all the miseries from which we suffer, and it extends over the length and breadth of the entire empire. Not one-hundredth part of the atrocities committed in his name ever reach the ear of the Czar. An awful cry for the abolition of this monster evil that is gnawing at the very vitals of the nation—this gangrene that is sap-
ping away all that was good of a bad social system—this plague-spot that is tainting our whole national being—a great cry, I say, for its destruction has arisen! We will follow it to the death! Though we may perish our brethren will persevere, and the cause will triumph at last. To know our aim is half the battle; only by a thorough knowledge of the object sought can the goal ever be attained. This it is that made the revolutionists of the eighteenth century successful! To win a great and known object led a Mirabeau ever onward, animated a Danton, and was the key-note to the conduct of a Robespierre!

“In the struggle for freedom there is only one class

that can be absolutely relied upon as being with us. Herzen fully recognised this when he said that the true revolutionist is no longer to be found amongst the professors of differing creeds or advanced political views; is no longer either protestant, catholic, liberal, or democratic—he is the *working-man*. Only the latter can be entirely fearless, for in a struggle he has less than nothing to lose and everything to gain. The working-man and the true revolutionist are synonymous terms. A high and artificial state of civilization prevents the upper classes from associating themselves with a movement which appears to strike at the root of all existing institutions. The fetters of a slavish superstition holds vast multitudes enchained, to whom it would be useless to look for aid or co-operation. The poison of priestcraft has for too many centuries permeated their views and vitiated their entire system, whilst its enfeebling influence numbs the limbs and arrests the effort to attain the dignity of freedom—freedom of thought as well as freedom of body. From these it were useless to seek for help; nay, they would be active in opposing us. Only the working-man, as a class, is to be depended upon. The others—monarchs, nobles, priests, landowners, and the bourgeoisie—hold their very existence staked on a continuance of the

present system; their surroundings, their education, their prejudices, their possessions, render them conservative and averse to change; whilst the dread of losing these advantages makes them fearful—fills them with a sordid timidity, and they would sooner grovel on as fawning, crouching, subservient, time-serving slaves than gloriously revolt against the degrading fetters that enchain them, and raise the standard of Freedom—the banner bearing the glorious motto ‘Land and Liberty’—the land no more the property of wealthy monopolists, but distributed in just proportion amongst the population, and freedom of thought, together with freedom of action, so far as the latter shall be compatible with the good of the common-wealth.

“Noble aspirations, brothers, notwithstanding that our enemies and those wholly ignorant of our objects and designs stigmatise us as destroyers from a wanton delight in destruction, as murderers rushing headlong into crime from the pure love of imbruing our hands in human blood, as a set of miscreants to be hunted down and trampled out with as little mercy as the wolves of Caucasus.

“What hecatombs of victims have been already sacrificed upon the altar of Freedom in this unhappy

land ! What barbarous severities have been practised towards those who only dared to use the brains with which God has endowed them—who only ventured to exercise the reasoning power which removes us from the brute beasts. Look at the fever-haunted prisons crammed to overflowing with suspects, the great majority of whom were wholly innocent of any wrong ; look at the weary train of banished criminals sent eastward yearly to the frozen miseries of Siberia ; look at the numbers who have perished on the scaffold, beneath the rod, or from cruel torture ! Is it to be wondered that we resist when such iniquities are practised—iniquities the bare recital of which is sufficient to make the blood boil, and the breast burst with indignation ? I hold a paper here in my hand relating to the fate of some of our brothers and sisters—let me read a few extracts from it at random.”

The speaker’s blood was up, and a stern determination overspread the faces of his audience. That every word told home was written plainly on even the most impassive countenance. Opening the document he carried, the Nihilist delegate read as follows :—

“Wassily Lichareff and Valérie von Rosenberg were both arrested on suspicion, and detained for more than two years in a horrible dungeon whilst the authorities

were trumping up a case against them. Valérie, the daughter of a Lieutenant-General in the Russian army, a fragile girl, but one whose spirit was indomitable, had relinquished her friends, her home, her position, for the sake of our holy cause. She had clad herself in the miserably-insufficient raiment of a factory operative, and had worked for sixteen hours a day at a machine, herding with hundreds of the lower orders, sharing their hardships, their privations, their filthy accommodation—even going bare-footed to the river and drawing water when her turn for the performance of such menial offices arose. This she did; such surroundings she endured cheerfully, to preach the gospel of Freedom amongst a class that could not otherwise be reached. Let us rejoice that we have many such noble women in our ranks!”—a murmur of applause ran through the listeners.

“Lichareff is known personally to some of you—by reputation to all. His talents and energy are indisputable, and he devoted his entire being to the emancipation of his countrymen from their condition of moral bondage. For two long years these victims were kept in prison—I need not explain to you all that is conveyed in those words—whilst the police were fabri-

cating evidence. Valérie had, on a former occasion, been imprisoned for three years, but had resumed her duty immediately on regaining her liberty. She had spread abroad the doctrines of our holy cause; beyond this there was nothing against her. They were brought to trial, but every report of the proceedings was suppressed, the evidence produced being so odious in character that the authorities were afraid to publish it. The accusation against Wassily Lichareff was that he belonged to the Socialistic party, and had attempted the life of an officer of the gendarmerie.' Certain letters—forged letters—from men known to be Socialists, were produced in support of the first charge. As regards the second and more serious charge, the public prosecutor stated 'that the accused, whilst in prison, had met a police-officer in one of the corridors, had unbuttoned his overcoat, and put his hands in his trousers-pockets, with the intention of shooting the official.'

"Could anything be more absurd upon the face of it? Lichareff certainly did possess a revolver, but the weapon was lying in its case at his former lodgings, *unloaded*. Do the authorities permit prisoners to carry fire-arms? They certainly did not when I was under

their hands. It was a tissue of foul lies, too grotesque in their construction to be credited by any but merciless judges who had arrived at a foregone conclusion.

“A charge of firing at a police-agent was preferred against Valérie. She boldly acknowledged that she had done so, but proved beyond dispute that it was purely in self-defence; that the official had assaulted her with more than the usual brutality of his class.

“It was in vain; both she and Lichareff were condemned to be shot, but the Governor of K—— exercised the prerogative of mercy vested in his hands, and our sister’s sentence was commuted to life-long servitude in the Siberian mines.

“Two days later Wassily Lichareff, our brother, was executed—but how? Only those who are acquainted with our Government can guess. He was publicly hanged, but—refinement of barbarity!—the knot of the rope was so adjusted that he continued to struggle for more than thirty minutes before death by slow strangulation put an end to his sufferings.

“But with his death were his persecutors contented? Not so; I have more to add. Simply to exact payment of the last debt of Nature does not satisfy the vengeance of a Government such as ours. The criminal’s mother and little sister, who had travelled far to bid him fare-

well, were both arrested immediately upon their arrival in the town, forbidden to see him, and thrown into prison. The wretched mother was set at liberty after the execution, and returned to her home with a double sorrow bowing down her aged head; for not only had she lost her noble son—the bread-winner of the family, but she had also to bewail the unhappy fate of her daughter, a child of thirteen, who was driven on foot, and in chains, to the banks of the Don, seven hundred dreary versts from her kindred, there to repent at leisure the crime of being sister to a man whom the authorities had unjustly doomed to death. Valérie von Rosenberg is at this moment on the road to Siberia, unless death, more merciful than the Third Section, has put an end to her sufferings.

“Yes, brothers, our Government does not hesitate to wreak its vengeance upon children who should be playing happily in the nursery; upon fragile girls who should be the future mothers of brave men. Hear another case.

“On a charge of distributing prohibited books, and propagating Socialistic ideas, three young ladies, the daughters of a nobleman of high rank and large fortune, were arrested and cast into prison. Augusta von Wissen, the eldest girl, had thrown herself heart and soul into

the Cause, but her sisters were young and less active. In no other country in Europe would a finger have been laid upon them: hear what happened in Holy Russia. On the death of their father these young ladies became rich, and devoted their fortune to the cause of Freedom. They were arrested and dragged from one prison to another for the space of two years, whilst subjected to all the degradation and insult the malice of their foes could contrive; more especially Augusta, whose steadfastness had drawn down upon her the deep hatred of the authorities. This girl—young, active, and robust—when finally brought to trial was so changed as to be unrecognisable by her very sisters; her health had completely broken down under the rigours of her confinement, and she stood at the bar a mere shadow of her former self in body, although the spirit within burned clearly as ever. Suborned witnesses were produced—all Russia knows it—and these three sisters were sentenced to the mines. The medical men declared that Augusta could never bear the journey—that a rapid consumption was carrying her to the grave, and that in a few weeks she would cease from troubling all principalities and powers. Better ask mercy from hungry tigers! These delicate girls with heavy chains on their

arms—fettters uniting them to criminals of the lowest order and worst type—were hurried off on foot to their living death. Small wonder that Augusta soon succumbed ; her worn-out body, the feeble husk that had inclosed so valiant a spirit, was thrown into a hastily-made hole by the road-side, shortly after she had attained her twenty-second year. Her sorrowing sisters were not allowed one single day's repose to mourn her loss, but were hurried forward with the convict train, and are now serving their life-long sentence.

“ Augusta von Wisin, brothers and sisters, lies in the inhospitable wilds, on the bleak slopes of the barren Ural. She of whom it was written by one who knew and loved her well, that ‘ It is impossible to give any adequate idea of her generous, noble nature, of her beauty, grace, and unselfish devotion,’ she has found a last resting-place that the poorest peasant would think unworthy of his dog. Yes, weep, my sisters, let the salt tears flow freely—drops wrung from your heart's core by this unvarnished history of cruel oppression. Yet when the fountains of sacred grief are opened let it not be in sorrow for our departed martyr. She is resolved to the elements, has at last finally eluded the grasp of tyranny, can no more be subjected to brutal

gibes, to cold, to starvation, to cruel insults, to degradation too awful to think of. None of us can ever hope to plant even a flower upon her lowly grave, for every trace by which it could be recognised has been carefully obliterated; but the warm sun will light up the unknown spot no less surely in summer, while the soft white snow will form a spotless coverlet when the great luminary has sunk to rest beneath the Arctic circle. The perfumed breezes from the pine forests will sigh and the fierce blasts from the bleak tundras will sweep over her tomb, and each, as it reaches us, will whisper or shriek in our ears this tale of ruthless butchery—will nerve us to avenge her who died so young and so nobly—will awaken fresh enthusiasm for the cause she perished in furthering—will breathe into us the resolve to emulate her heroism—will make us envy the fate that befell Augusta von Wisin, and caused her to be enshrined for ever in the hearts of a chosen few who are banded together in an undying struggle with tyranny and oppression.”

For some few moments the orator ceased; then the suppressed sobs burst forth from the women, and many of the men were fain to hide their faces. Such of the gentler sex as were present were not much given to

"the melting mood," but the rough eloquence of the speaker, no less than the harrowing nature of his theme, had touched them profoundly. After all, a woman remains a woman though she strive never so earnestly to put away womanly things. We may subdue nature but we cannot destroy it, cannot by a mere effort of will root out affection and substitute a block of marble for a heart. So the tears of these manly young lady-revolutionists dropped freely, and their brother conspirators thought no worse of them for this display of feeling.

"I could easily continue my recital of the merciless acts perpetrated by the authorities against all who have the audacity even to form an opinion for themselves," continued Ivan Ivanovitch, "but enough on the subject has been said already. Many of you have suffered imprisonment yourselves for the cause—all of you have friends who have undergone punishment. It were therefore useless to recount incidents that can only harrow the feelings without deepening our horror of their ruthless perpetrators; and it is against these men that we are arrayed. By tyranny a peaceful socialism has become developed into a state that can be best described as a terrorism. Our harmless aspirations for freedom were

checked with an iron hand, and from repression has sprung a system of retributive justice which has carried fear into the very strongholds of our enemies. Why should we, of all European nations, be the only one in which liberty of thought is sternly prohibited? Are we different from other men? Are we endowed with a less number of senses? Are our faculties duller and our mental powers beneath the ordinary standard, that we should be denied all liberty and that the whole empire should be converted into one vast prison? I think not. We have able and clever men amongst us, as well as resolute ones. But it is evident that appeals to justice will never gain us the end for which we strive. We have tried peaceful means, and failed; we have now reverted to sterner measures, and are becoming feared—a great stride on the road towards success. The terror that we have established must be kept up. The authorities must be taught to recognise that they cannot arrest, imprison, starve, persecute, and torture us with impunity to themselves. It is the chiefs of the Reactionary party that we must seek to terrify; and, if the means we adopt are deprecated by the citizens of more favoured nations, we must ask them to place themselves in our position, and then see if they would manifest

more patient endurance of great wrong than we have done.

“Brothers and sisters, be firm, be united, be watchful! My duty here is accomplished in impressing these three essentials upon you. Go forth boldly on your way and preach the holy cause to high and low, but do so without awakening the suspicions of the authorities. Our good friend Anton Petrovitch will in the course of a few days have ready for private circulation a number of pamphlets designed to bring in new recruits to our ranks, and to stir up to action those who are lukewarm. Distribute them carefully but widely; never lose an opportunity of pushing our propaganda; work on silently, like the mole, and we shall eventually accomplish our object. As a body, we should never shrink from trying a fall with the powers that be. They may, probably will, prove victorious; but the moral accession of strength which even defeat confers upon us more than compensates for our loss. A victory may be bought at too great a sacrifice, and this the enemy will in time acknowledge.

“Brothers and sisters, when your attendance is again required the usual notice will be given;” and with these concluding words the speaker stepped down from

the chest on which he had been mounted while addressing the Socialists, and quitted the apartment. In five minutes the workshop was empty and silent.

Perhaps the reader can now form some idea how Anton Petrovitch earned a livelihood. He was a Nihilist printer, who struck off the impressions required by the society.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRISIS.

ODESSA was making merry. The inhabitants, clad in their gayest attire, thronged the streets; the ships in the harbour and alongside the quays donned their bravery of parti-coloured flags; and the bells kept up a ceaseless din. The new Governor, General von Fahlenberg, had arrived, had held a great *levée*, at which all the principal families in Kherson had been represented—except Prince Soudakoff; and had formally assumed the reins of power. Count Naryschkin, the former Governor, had gone off quietly by train, attended only by his personal staff, and unnoticed by all those who had most loudly praised his justice and clemency a few weeks before. They were too busily employed

in worshipping the rising luminary to bestow any attention on the setting star. Do not blame them. It is the way of the world, and probably you and I would do exactly the same.

The halls and reception and anterooms of the palace were crowded with a brilliant assemblage. Rich jewels glittered in the light of numberless wax candles, uniformed men and faultlessly-dressed women listened to the soft voluptuous strains of one of Strauss's most seductive waltzes, some of the younger ones danced, and the spurs of the cavaliers clinked in pleasing accompaniment to the music. All seemed happy and devoid of care, smiles played on every face, a soft sensuous perfume prevailed the atmosphere; surely if earth can afford a respite from carking care this gay company is enjoying it!

Alas! no. Many a desolate heart is concealed beneath a parure of brilliants, many an aching brow pressed by a jewelled tiara. But take courage, poor human clay. Wear the mask of indifference, matron, though thy bosom is inwardly bleeding for thy first-born languishing in chains and filthy rags. Pass the light jest, maiden, and daintily touch with thy lips the creaming goblet. Forget that thy lover is being hurried ever eastward over the dreary Asian wilds to

a servitude worse than death. Nay, it is legal death. Assume thy most winning smiles, young wife, and gain another life-companion, for has not the sentence passed on him who twelve months ago led thee a bride to the altar freed thee? The law has struck off thy fetters. Thou mayest wed again; thy bonnie bridegroom is no more, is a fiction, is not recognised as existing, is a cypher—a mere unit, is a convict. Tear him from out thy heart and mate afresh, choosing thy partuer with more discretion. Trample down all show of feeling, smile loyally at the starred and decorated representative of the power that has done this deed; or if thou smilest not at least look not sad, for melancholy means discontent, and discontent means disloyalty, and disloyalty means—Siberia!

George and Yanina Bromirska have paused for a while in the dance, when a servant brings in a telegram addressed to the young man. He thrusts it into his pocket, and not until the music is over and he has conducted the girl to her chaperon does he seek a retired spot to ascertain who could have business so urgent as to warrant them in disturbing him at this unseemly hour. Impatiently he tears off the cover; a glance shows him that it is from Arthur Middleton, and he eagerly makes himself master of the contents.

"Prince Soudakoff arrested this morning, and taken off by train, gagged, and with great secrecy. Perhaps you can understand this, I cannot."

The young man's head whirled round helplessly on reading these few words. Ten minutes before how happy had he been; his arm encircling the waist of his beloved, his eyes meeting downcast but tender glances that told too surely the maiden's secret. Now an event had occurred by which both she and her second mother must be plunged into deepest sorrow.

Reflection showed him that it would be useless to mar the harmony of the evening by communicating the sad news until the ball was over. Yanina's brave spirit would not quail before any act of oppression; but the Princess was of less stern material, and would probably scream out, faint, or assail the Governor with a torrent of reproaches. She was weak, and could not be depended upon in an emergency. He would wait until they got home, and, meanwhile, he must banish all care from his mind, or, at all events, prevent it from being visible on his face.

This last determination was easier in theory than in practice, and when he again spoke to Yanina his absence of mind was so apparent that the girl taxed him with having received bad news, and was by no

means satisfied with George's halting denial, and the eagerness he displayed in pursuing another topic.

"I think that General von Fahlenberg is a very handsome man, don't you, Yanina?" prattled the Princess, as the carriage traversed the short distance that separated the palace from the Hôtel Soudakoff, "and I will not believe one word of the absurd stories about his severity. Even if they were true there would be little harm. I have no patience with your papa and his schemes for the improvement of the peasantry. I thought the General looked very kindly at me, as if that dear creature, Bodiskoff, had been speaking in our favour—did you notice it? But no—of course not. You seemed to have eyes for no one but the young Englishman, Donnington, to-night. That young man will singe his wings if you let him approach you so nearly, my love. Why, here he is at the door, I do declare! How very polite! Quite unlike an Englishman!"

George handed the ladies out, and took the opportunity of whispering to Yanina that he had a matter of great moment to communicate to her in private, urging its importance as his excuse for craving an audience at so late an hour. The girl led the way to a small boudoir, wondering what this strange interview could

mean. She was well aware in her heart of hearts that the young man loved her ; but, although she had heard many extraordinary stories of the eccentricities displayed by heart-stricken Britons, she could hardly believe that he had chosen such a time and place to declare his passion. They entered the room, and, in reply to Yanina's inquiring look, George placed Arthur Middleton's telegram in her hands.

On reading it the girl grew deadly pale, her eyes filled with tears, and her slender form swayed as though she would have fallen to the ground ; but this was only for a moment ; soon indignation took the place of grief, and the red flush mounted to her cheek as she said, firmly, " This is Count Bodiskoff's doing. I know it ! He is a false friend, a snake in the grass, who has beguiled the Princess and ruined my guardian ! He must have known this, too, when he thrust his hateful attentions upon me at the ball. Coward ! Oh ! my poor unhappy guardian ! " she cried, as the horror of the position came home to her. " What will become of us now that you are torn away ? We are only two feeble women, helpless to contend alone with the force brought against us. What, oh what, shall we do ?—our only stay and support is gone ! " and the girl covered her face with

her hands, whilst through the fingers the hot tears slowly trickled.

“Not quite alone, Yanina,” cried George, moved beyond himself at the sight of his idol’s distress, “not quite alone, for am I not here to shield and protect you? Oh! my darling, have you not guessed how fondly, how deeply, I love you?” In his earnestness the young man had advanced, and throwing his arms round the girl had drawn her bowed head to his shoulder: “Only tell me that my love is returned, Yanina; give me a lover’s right to protect you—to watch over you—may I believe this? Oh, God! it seems too great happiness to be true!” for the little head was pressed confidently against his breast, and the dark grey eyes, tearful, but truthful, were looking up lovingly into his face.

At the expiration of half-an-hour—it seemed less than half-a-minute—George tore himself away, promising to return again to breakfast, by which time the girl would have broken the bad news to the Princess. On gaining the street he dismissed his carriage, preferring to walk quietly home and reflect on all that had passed. Engrossed in thought, he was hardly conscious of what transpired around him—certainly took

no heed of a man who passed him near his own door, and paused for a moment to look into his face. George's gaze must have fallen upon this curious stranger ; but he had never seen him before, and he excited no interest. Yet, had he known how large an influence this man's report would exercise on his future he would have been justified in striking him to the ground. It was Michael Berolak, the spy, who had both witnessed and overheard every word that had passed between George and Yanina, and who was then on his way to report the whole incident to Count Bodiskoff.

That astute officer had not retired for the night when his agent arrived, and the news brought by the latter made him little inclined for sleep. He had played his cards admirably, having represented Prince Soudakoff in the blackest colours to the Governor, and with that gentleman's approval had obtained orders from St. Petersburg for the suspected nobleman's arrest. General von Fahlenberg had been already prejudiced against the Prince, and fully believed him to be a very mischievous man, whose absence from the neighbourhood was quite essential to the suppression of Nihilism, so he lent a willing ear to Bodiskoff when he roundly asserted that Soudakoff was at the head of all the secret plotting in Kherson, and that ill-used philan-

thropist was accordingly arrested in the manner described by Middleton, and removed to the capital.

So far all had gone well with the Count, but he now found himself saddled with more than one difficulty. Having destroyed Soudakoff's letter to the Governor, he must prevent any meeting between the latter and the Princess. He had also cause for uneasiness on Donnington's account, for he had learnt that the young man held the bill given by him to Prince Baratoff; and now it turned out that in the Englishman he had also to fear a favoured rival in the affections of Yanina Bromirska. It was all embarrassing; but, as he held George under his thumb through Kurylowicz, who was ready to testify against him at any moment, there was no real cause for anxiety. He would visit the Princess at an early hour, and see how matters stood.

When Bodiskoff called at the hotel he found the Princess in a state of violent agitation and distress, which rather increased than diminished upon the entry of her visitor. She loudly declared that some malicious hand had struck this blow at her happiness, and announced her intention of seeking an audience with the Governor forthwith. With much apparent sympathy and many well-selected phrases, Bodiskoff endeavoured to soothe her, offering to prepare the General

for the interview. The poor lady's weak nature was wont to lean entirely upon others for support in any trial, and she embraced this second kind offer of the Count's with effusion; so that officer went forth upon his errand, leaving her much calmer, and promising to return and conduct her to the Governor at whatever hour the latter might appoint.

He went and fulfilled his promise in so far that he acquainted Von Fahlenberg with the lady's intention, but painted her mental condition in such colours that the Governor absolutely refused to see her. "Why, good Heaven! Bodiskoff," he cried, "if I am expected to hear the complaints of every lunatic old woman whose belongings have gone astray I shall be occupied the whole day. Tell the old idiot to be off to Tiraspol, and not to show her nose near me. I was looking at her last night—a very silly, vain old goose!"

"What shall I do?" cried the unhappy lady when the Count reported this. "I am in total ignorance where they have taken my husband."

"Be guided by the Governor, dear Princess," rejoined Bodiskoff, "and retire at once to Tiraspol, where you can remain quietly until I find out the place in which my poor friend is detained. Perhaps you have forgotten in your distress that a curator must be appointed to manage

the estate and receive the revenues until this unpleasantness has blown over. It lies within the power of such a person to render himself very disagreeable; and to obviate this I will endeavour to have the appointment conferred upon myself, whom you must always regard as a true friend, whose chief happiness it will be to study your convenience and ensure your comfort. Why not start at once? there is a train in half-an-hour. Believe me I am advising you for your own good."

Not a suspicion of the traitor's good faith crossed the poor woman's mind. In Bodiskoff's expert hands she was plastic as clay; and in pursuance of this counsel she rang the bell, and gave immediate orders for the journey, after which she rushed off in search of Yanina.

The girl had already seen her lover that morning; but, on hearing from the Princess that an immediate return to Tiraspol was contemplated, she sent for George, and the young people had a hasty but important conference. Without the slightest disguise the girl explained the persecution and insults to which she had been subjected by Count Bodiskoff, and reiterated her positive conviction that he was the prime instigator in the Prince's removal. "The man is a daring and desperate villain," she concluded, "and would venture anything to gain the inheritance that

will some day be mine. But be calm, George, I implore you, and let nothing induce you to take rash action," for the young man's blood was at boiling-pitch on hearing these revelations. "Unprincipled and vicious as I know Count Bodiskoff to be, you must remember that I have no shadow of proof in support of my suspicions, not enough even to make the Princess act with ordinary caution. She is infatuated with the man, and trusts him implicitly ; so I must stand by and witness in silence the plausible wiles by which he lures to destruction those whom I love best on earth. No ; not quite those I love best," she continued, remarking a reproachful shade cross her lover's face ; "you have won the first place in my heart, George, but poor mamma and papa must certainly rank next. Thank God these treacherous people cannot hurt you, dear," she added, in reply to the caress with which he greeted her loving confession. "You, as an Englishman, are at least beyond the reach of their wicked machinations. Now good-bye, dear, but only for a short time I trust.

"Remember, my darling, that Middleton is our true friend," whispered the young man, whilst handing the girl into the carriage ; "and if Bodiskoff renders himself the least obnoxious let Arthur know, and he will send me a telegram at once. Impudent scoundrel !

Were it not for your positive injunctions, Yanina, I would call him to an immediate account for his villainy."

"Again I beseech you not to complicate matters by any rashness," cried Yanina, as the train steamed out of the station, carrying with it the two ladies and their retinue. It had been deemed wisest by the young people to keep their engagement a secret for the present; the Princess was in a state of highest excitement, and it would have been cruel to add to her responsibilities at that moment.

On reaching the château the poor woman was thrown into an agony of terror by finding a detachment of police in possession of the mansion. These officials in their search for treasonable correspondence or other incriminating documents had turned the place upside down, breaking open costly cabinets, thrusting probes into the furniture, and committing an infinity of vexatious and unnecessary damage. To all the Princess's entreaties and expostulations they turned a deaf ear, and it was with some difficulty that they were induced to retire from those portions of the premises inhabited by the lady and her ward. The former, in her helpless wrath, had despatched a telegram to Count Bodiskoff, beseeching him to come in person, or to send orders and rid the château of the intruders. This course she

adopted entirely in opposition to the advice of Yanina, who counselled present submission and a direct appeal to St. Petersburg, whither it seemed almost certain the Prince had been removed, but the Princess refused to listen, and was overjoyed when, on the following day, the Count arrived.

This gentleman immediately dismissed the obnoxious police-agents, and took up his abode in the house, nominally in fulfilment of his duties of curator, a post he had obtained without difficulty, but really in pursuit of his designs on Yanina. To the latter his presence was odious, but the Princess derived the greatest comfort therefrom, and manifested no small indignation with her ward for the attitude of marked coolness she assumed towards so amiable and kind-hearted a protector.

At first Bodiskoff treated the girl with differential politeness, hoping by such a course to change the aversion with which she now regarded him into esteem, but finding this useless he lost no opportunity of pushing his suit in the manner most congenial to his coarse and brutal nature. For some days Yanina's life was rendered miserable by his persecutions, and she almost resolved on flight to avoid his incessant

intrusions. He had made a confidant of the Princess, and she weakly sided with him, bestowing implicit credence on all the reports prejudicial to the Prince which he poured into her ears, together with the sinister forebodings of coming evil, which he averred could only be counteracted by his goodwill and agency. Eager to propitiate one so powerful for good or evil, the Princess aided him by every means in her power to gain the girl's favourable consideration, and between them both her every hour was embittered, and, had she not been sustained by her deep love for George, even her brave spirit might have been conquered by the opposing forces. Her only safeguard, she perceived, lay in quitting the country as soon as possible. While yet a child she had resided for some months at Berne, and had retained a most pleasing remembrance of the lovely little Swiss capital. There at all events she would be freed from the presence of her hateful persecutor, and from the scarcely less objectionable scoldings of the Princess. But first she must see and consult with George, and here a difficulty presented itself, for she knew that any letter she wrote would be tampered with, and her pride forbade the employment of any intermediary agent. Suddenly she remembered

Arthur Middleton, and within an hour a telegram was placed in Donnington's hands. It contained only four words :—

“Come. I want you. Y.”

* * * * *

Dinner was over, the ladies had retired, and Count Bodiskoff was left to the uninterrupted and solitary enjoyment of his wine and cigar. Apparently his mood was unpleasant, or something had lately happened to disturb him, for his face was flushed, his brows knit, and he puffed out huge volumes of smoke in a rapid, almost a defiant manner.

“Insolent little Polish minx,” he muttered, after draining nearly a tumbler of raw cognac. “She dares both to refuse and defy me, but she little knows with whom she has to deal. I could send her off to cool her dainty feet in Siberia without any difficulty, but that would not release me from my present troubles. Baratoff's bill must be taken up in ten days, otherwise I am ruined. Curses on that fool Szluma, who brought me the ten thousand roubles just as I was starting for the Club, and curses fifty-fold rain upon Leparski, who persuaded me to try my luck with the d——d cards again! All gone! Every rouble of the sum that would have cleared me vanished! And this

girl who might save me refuses even to listen to my suit, which she should regard as an honour! Male-dictions upon her, but she shall not elude me, however cleverly she may turn and double;" and, after again refilling and emptying his glass, Bodiskoff, with some unsteadiness in his gait, made for the boudoir, where the ladies were accustomed to spend their evening.

Yanina was sitting at the open window—it was summer—buried in thought, when her persecutor entered. It was but rarely that he forsook the table at so early an hour, and she did not in the least expect him, otherwise she would never have remained alone in the room, which the Princess had left a few minutes before. Her horror at the situation in which she was placed increased when she noticed the intruder's flushed face and heard the thick accents in which he addressed her.

"So I have caught you all alone, eh, little Countess?" he cried. "You escaped me twice this afternoon, but now I think I have you safe enough. There is no one likely to interrupt us while I pour my tale of love into your pretty ear, is there Yanina mine?"

He stood before the girl, who had risen from her seat and boldly confronted him, with drunken insolence, and glared into her face with ill-concealed passion.

"Nay, do not run away," he said hoarsely, and at the same time throwing his arm round her waist as she endeavoured to pass him. "It is not often that we find ourselves alone together."

The look of scorn with which the girl regarded him almost caused his rude grasp to slacken, but her great beauty and the fumes of the spirit acting together on his brain made him reckless, and he held her yet closer as he said,—

"Then pay forfeit before you go, little Countess. See—one kiss, only one—there is no one near to witness the sweet token of your affection."

"Coward!" cried the girl, struggling desperately as he bent his face forward and the vinous breath poured upon her neck, "Coward! help, help!" she screamed, as a footstep was heard in the corridor without.

The door flew open—a light form bounded into the boudoir—a dull sound, crushing and irresistible, was heard—the Russian fell to the earth as though shot, and before Yanina could utter a word another arm was round her and another voice was breathing words of love, pity, and reassurance in her ear—George Donnington had arrived in answer to her telegram, and had thus announced himself.

An hour later George stood on the platform at

Tiraspol, watching the rear lights of the guard's break as a train moved slowly from the station towards the west. He gazed wistfully as the little circles of fire grew dimmer, but not until they had died out in the distance did he turn round and say with a sigh to the man who was standing beside him,—

“They have taken the wisest course after all, Arthur. Neither the Princess nor Mademoiselle Bromirska would be in security after what has happened to-night.”

“They will be much safer at Berne,” returned Middleton. “Come and have some coffee, and then get a good night's rest. Shall you leave for Odessa by the first train in the morning?”

“Yes, I must be on the spot for the message that scoundrel is sure to send me.”

“I hope you punished him well, George?” said Arthur, reflectively.

“Enough to keep him from mischief for the next twenty-four hours, I think,” returned Donnington with suppressed wrath. “I only wish I had killed him.”

“Perhaps you will yet. Now for some coffee,” and Arthur opened the door of his cottage where George was to find accommodation for the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARREST.

THE blow received by Count Bodiskoff would have been termed, in pugilistic circles, a regular facer. George had in early days been carefully instructed in the art of self-defence by Aldham, the keeper, and had exhibited much skill in his school combats. On this occasion passion and indignation had nerved his arm, and the Russian had gone down before his fist like a log, and lay stretched upon the floor a helpless and inert mass. Assistance was summoned, and the prostrate form removed to bed by the attendants, who manifested much suppressed delight at the deplorable plight of the dreaded functionary. Here it was discovered that the patient was bleeding considerably from a scalp-wound,

caused by his head coming in contact with the edge of a marble table, so a doctor was sent for, who dressed the cut and administered restoratives; but it was not until late on the following day that Bodiskoff fully regained consciousness, and was able to reflect clearly on all that had passed. By this time George was at Odessa, quietly pursuing his usual avocations, and expecting hourly a hostile message from Bodiskoff, concerning whose movements Arthur Middleton had promised to give him information by telegram.

The first step taken by the wounded man after reflection was to send for Mosiek Szluma, and he passed a sleepless night between pain and rage, cursing the tardiness of his factotum in answering the summons. The Jew could not possibly arrive for several hours, and this time the Count occupied in meditating schemes of vengeance, which he was reluctantly compelled to abandon, one after the other, at the dictates of prudence and common sense. Perverted as the man's nature was, he remained an officer and had the natural instincts of his caste; and that he, a Russian gentleman of noble birth, should have been felled like an ox by the huge fist of a British trader, galled him to the core, and made him yearn for revenge—deep, lasting, cruel—with a ceaseless longing which bade

fair to disorder his brain. To challenge George and shoot him like a dog was his first and most natural thought. "No," he reflected, grinding his teeth savagely, "not shoot him; that would be too good for the British hound, but maim him—mark him for life—destroy the features that have won the heart of that little Polish devil. And she has escaped me too! Whilst I was lying here senseless as a log she was speeding towards the frontier, and that chattering old fool of a woman with her. Oh! what a debt I have to clear off! Would that the good old laws were still in force, then could I have that English scoundrel flogged, branded, his nostrils torn out, and what was left of him condemned to the mines. Now it cannot be. That British Jew has a long arm and has made his cursed islanders feared. Why does not that hound of Israel, Mosiek, come? I will cause his lagging footsteps to be quickened by the *plète*."

At length Szluma—who, learning the true condition of his patron, had purposely travelled as slowly as his own safety permitted, revelling in the agony of impatience endured by the wounded man—arrived, and was at once admitted to the sick chamber, where he listened with much apparent humility to the torrent of reproach and invective poured upon him by its occu-

pant, merely remarking, when weakness caused the speaker to desist, "The Excellency must not excite himself. May old Mosiek ask what has happened?"

"Happened! I have been struck, as though I were a dog, by the Englishman, Donnington. What say you to that?"

"A Russian noble struck by a foreigner!" cried the Jew, with well-feigned horror. "He dared to lay such an insult on the Excellency? The rash young man is dead, of course?" The tormentor loved to see the oppressor writhing beneath his sympathy.

"No; he lives, curses on him; and I carry his brand on my face for ever. But I will be revenged—aye, though it costs me my life. Why do you stand silent, cursed Hebrew?" continued the angry man. "Speak—devise some plan—help me, and you shall be rewarded."

"The Excellency must tell his servant everything that has occurred, without reserve," observed the Jew, quietly.

His patron saw the justice of this, and related every incident of the attempt on Yanina which had ended so disastrously for himself; the spy sat in silence by the bed, listening intently.

"Yes, she is beyond my reach," concluded Bodiskoff, "but he remains and I will kill him."

"The Excellency's skill with both sword and pistol is undoubted, but this young man must not be wounded by his hand," observed the Jew.

"Why not?"

"Because such a meeting would be the common talk of Odessa, and its cause known, which would be inconvenient to the Excellency. People would say he met his death because he happened to hold the Excellency's bill. They have scandalous tongues, and the Excellency—he will pardon his servant for saying so—is not beloved by all."

"You are right, Mosiek," said the Count, grimly. "But how can I deal with him in any other way? He is a British subject, not a Russian—would that he were!"

The Jew pondered for a while and then said suddenly, "Arrest him!"

"Arrest him! On what plea?"

"As a Nihilist—as a most dangerous conspirator," murmured Szluma, calmly.

"But we have no evidence. He will easily prove his innocence."

"Not if the Excellency manages matters properly.

It will certainly require money . . . yes, a good sum," continued Mosiek, meditatively.

"I care little what it costs so that my revenge is secured. This fellow has balked me in everything—has robbed me of the girl and has struck me. Oh God! I feel his knuckles now on my brow, burning—burning like molten lead. Only blood will allay the agony. Go on, money shall be forthcoming. How am I to manage matters?"

"Does the Excellency remember my attending a Nihilist meeting at this place some weeks ago? Well, there was present—I had not time to report it earlier—a delegate from Moscow, one Ivan Ivanovitch, sent for the purpose of stirring up the conspirators to further exertions. This man made a most seditious speech; and, Excellency, I discovered a secret; his real name was not Ivan Ivanovitch, but Wladimir Nikitsky, brother to Bertha, the girl who shot General Berstel."

"Dog! Why did you not acquaint me with this earlier?" thundered Bodiskoff.

"Because I only learnt it this morning," lied the Jew, with calm assurance. "Found it out just in time to be of use to the Excellency. Nothing remains to be done but to fill up an order for this man's apprehension,

making the description tally exactly with Donnington, who can be arrested privately and sent off to Tula. Once lodge him there, and I can produce evidence enough to condemn twenty men. But it will require money, Excellency."

"Who will you bring forward as witnesses?"

"Myself and two friends," returned the Jew, evasively, "but both the latter must be well paid."

"Have I not already said that money shall be forthcoming? Tell me at once the names of the men who will appear. No evasion or prevarication, Mosiek Szluma. Remember, Radom!" he added, menacingly.

The spy cowered at the threat conveyed in the two words, and muttered doggedly, "Nathan Nathanovitch, the innkeeper here, and Schmuld, his son."

"Small chance for the poor devil who has those worthies arrayed against him," murmured Bodiskoff.

"The Excellency can also call Mathias Schimkow and Kurylowicz to prove that the young man was associated with the revolutionary party in England. Schimkow certainly has a soft heart, and I believe this Donnington was kind to him in London; it would grieve him greatly to betray confidence, but I make no doubt I could overcome his scruples if the Excellency. . . ."

"Silence, Hebrew robber!" roared the exasperated

Count. "Your miserable mind dwells on nothing but money. Get you gone to Odessa, and make out a dozen warrants, one of them answering the description of Donnington."

Left to himself Bodiskoff reflected on the scheme of revenge offered to him by his satellite's cunning, and the more he dwelt upon it the more feasible it appeared, though certain modifications in the details of the plot were absolutely necessary.

"Yes, the fickle dame is on my side at last," he mused. "She is tired of bestowing only kicks and buffets on a faithful adorer. All works well. Von Fahlenberg will sign unsuspectingly any warrant presented by me, and, if the Englishman's arrest does by any mischance become known, it can, at the worst, be attributed to an unfortunate error, the result of too great zeal on the part of my subordinates. They shall bear the brunt if things go wrong, whilst I will modestly appropriate the credit if matters prosper. The Princess has fled, too, which is fortunate as it turns out. There are a thousand ways of getting together a good round sum of money on an estate like this; why, the very pictures must be worth a million roubles. That crafty scoundrel hints that the outlay will be considerable; but I can easily recoup myself, and feather my nest to

boot. And—by Heaven, this has escaped me hitherto! —a search might be made in Donnington's house, just a quiet domiciliary visit, and the bill he holds might by accident fall into my hands. An excellent idea! My fellows can turn a place upside down without the owner suspecting that his privacy has been invaded. Capital, by Jove!" and the heartless rogue smiled at this combination of revenge and advantage to himself.

"And Yanina, too!" he thought. "She shall bitterly rue the scorn with which she has met my advances. Perhaps fortune has favoured me even in her flight. Fancy being tied for life to such a little tiger-cat! And nothing short of marriage would be of any avail. *Noblesse oblige*; were I to accomplish her downfall all her belongings in Poland would raise an uproar that would assuredly reach the ears of the Czar, and I should be disgraced. Our excellent ruler is too well-meaning, and it is lucky for the empire that he has amongst his advisers a few men of my stamp. I am sorry that Schimkow and Kurylowicz must be taken into my confidence; the former is an oily knave and will profess a thousand scruples which only gold can overcome. Yet he is a useful man—devilish deep though," and with this tribute to Count Ralowski's character Bodis-koff turned on his side and slept.

The morning brought further reflections. It would never do for Donnington to be arrested in Odessa, where he had many friends and was well known to the whole English circle. However privately the capture was effected it would assuredly gain wind and his countrymen would make an unpleasant commotion—would appeal to the ambassador, and render themselves generally disagreeable. It was the way with these money-grubbing islanders. No; the young man must be lured away and pounced upon in some quiet place; that was indispensable. But how? Ay, there was the rub, and over this knotty problem the interesting invalid pondered long and deeply, quickening his imagination by repeated draughts of Soudakoff's best brand of champagne.

"By Heaven! I have it!" he exclaimed, as a happy thought flashed through his brain; "I will challenge the fellow—he must be wondering at not having received a message earlier—d——n him!—I will challenge him and appoint a meeting at Razdelnaya. That will be the very place, for it lies halfway between here and Odessa, is very quiet, and is, moreover, on the main road to Tula, the architectural beauties of whose cells the young man shall have an early opportunity of inspecting. I can easily plead that my official position

precludes me from sending a challenge in the usual way, and his foolish chivalry will make him swallow the bait like any gull. I will write a diplomatic note stating this, and saying that if he will leave Odessa by the last train to-morrow he will find my friends on the platform at Razdelnaya ready to receive him and arrange all preliminaries for a meeting on the following morning. This will be strictly true," he thought, with a grim smile, "but my friends will be agents of the Third Section, and the time of meeting must remain an open question. I can appeal to 'that sense of honour for which his nation are so pre-eminently distinguished'—some foolish flattery of that kind which will help to lull all suspicion—as a guarantee that his movements will be kept absolutely secret, and shall suggest his giving out that he is going in some other direction, informing no living being of his real destination. As to a second, I can tell him that one of my brother-officers will gladly act for him on this occasion. I know the foolish fellow's open character so well that I feel certain he will blindly follow my advice, and ultimately he will have the pleasing fact, that by his own act he has baffled his friends' tender inquiries, to reflect upon, and add poignancy to the shaven head, the prison garb, the cramping irons, and

—I devoutly trust—the rod. Mosiek Szluma shall be my messenger; he will revel in carrying out a little device that really reflects the greatest credit on my inventive faculties.”

Having thus satisfactorily arranged as diabolical a plot as human ingenuity could devise, Bodiskoff felt more at peace with himself and the world in general, and only awaited the return of his Jew henchman to carry the scheme out in all its treacherous details. Immediately on that worthy's arrival with the warrants, the Count explained the ruse by which the victim was to be lured away, and felt no small gratification at the unqualified admiration his rascally project won from his subordinate. A conspiracy so vile enchanted Mosiek, who took actual pleasure in the misery of his neighbours, and besides, the Englishman was rich—all Englishmen were—and it would go hard if he could not wring a few thousand roubles from the victim by some pretext or another.

“Now you know your instructions, so be off. Take this letter to Major Bibikoff: it gives him directions concerning the time, place, and manner of the arrest, and he is not likely to let our bird flutter through the meshes of the net. He will also get the warrant signed by the Governor. I shall go to Razdelnaya

myself and witness the English dog's apprehension unseen. Remember that when Donnington has started you are to accompany the agents whom I have directed to search his dwelling. Possibly he may keep the cursed bill which I gave to Prince Baratoff at his own house, and if you can lay hands upon it and bring it to me quietly you shall not find me ungrateful. What! you want money, I suppose?" for the Jew still lingered. "Well, Mosiek, I am a generous master, and as this prisoner is of great importance to the state here is an order for a hundred roubles on account. Now away with you;" and the spy slunk from the room on his iniquitous errand without his stealthy footfall raising a sound.

"My worthy patron," he muttered, with a sickly grin, on reaching the courtyard, "thinks to fob me off with a display of generosity and a hundred roubles; he does not understand old Mosiek yet, and is a fool despite his cunning. If the bill he gave the gambler Baratoff falls into my hands he thinks I shall rush back at once and return it to him. At one time I might have been idiot enough to do so; now, by the beard of Aaron, I know better."

* * * * *

George Donnington had seen Mosiek Szluma, who,

with his usual craft had so painted Count Bodiskoff's peculiar position that the young man at once acceded to the proposals for profound secrecy embodied in the letter delivered to him by the Jew. He had made all necessary testamentary arrangements in the event of the duel proving fatal to himself, and had given his subordinates to understand that he was going southward for a couple of days wild-fowl shooting. Now he was on the point of starting for Razdelnaya, and stood at the door of his office awaiting the arrival of the vehicle that was to convey him to the station, when a telegram was put into his hand. Tearing it open he saw that it was in English, and ran as follows :

"Your enemy just started towards Odessa—Never saw a more villanous face in my life. Complete your good work by shooting him. Command me in every way—Arthur Middleton."

The young man thrust the paper into his pocket and was soon on the road towards Razdelnaya. Had any suspicion been awakened by Bodiskoff's unusual form of challenge, and his strong injunctions to observe the utmost secrecy, this telegram would have laid the feeling entirely at rest.

"Scoundrel as the Count is," thought George, "he intends business in this matter. He considers that

there is little disgrace in getting drunk and assaulting a young lady; but the smallest error in the unwritten code of honour must be rectified, so he intends to meet me at Razdelnaya and apologise profusely for the trouble he has occasioned before doing his best to shoot me to-morrow morning. A curious people, these Russians, certainly!"

The distance from Odessa to Razdelnaya is barely forty miles, and the run by train occupied little more than an hour. The young man was the only occupant of a first-class compartment, and had noticed that the guard turned away several passengers who wished to enter. "Very civil of the fellow," he thought, "for I do not feel much in the humour for company. Ah! here is M——; the next station will be mine; I must prepare to meet Bodiskoff and his friends. Halloa! what the devil do these fellows want? There must be plenty of room without their squeezing me to death! *Gensd'armes*, by Jove! Going in quest of some unhappy victim, I suppose. Well, it is no business of mine, and I shall be clear of them in a quarter of an hour."

Four *gensd'armes* and two men in civilian dress had entered George's carriage, the door of which was immediately slammed to and locked by some unseen

hand, and the train proceeded slowly on its way. Scarcely was the station cleared when, at a sign from one of the civilians, the four policemen threw themselves upon the unsuspecting Englishman, who in less than a moment was handcuffed, gagged, his arms bound behind his back at the elbows, and then hurled brutally down on the floor of the carriage, with the warning that if he made the slightest attempt to move or attract attention a bayonet would be used to bring him to silence and reason; and the men looked fully capable of carrying out their threats. Having thus reduced their captive to silence the *gensd'armes* proceeded to search him, and with the celerity bred of much experience transferred his watch and the contents of his pockets to their own, unearthing also Arthur Middleton's telegram, of which one of the civilians took possession.

Arrived at Razdelnaya a man came to the door and exchanged a few words with the prisoner's captors. The tones of his voice were too low for George to recognise them; but something in the fashion of speech seemed familiar, and the young man strove to catch a glimpse of the speaker's face, but unsuccessfully, for the stranger was closely enveloped in a large cloak, which he held in such a manner as completely to

shield his features ; only the eyes were visible—light grey colourless eyes such as are too common in Russia to attract attention, and no suspicion crossed the mind of the prisoner that they belonged to Alexis Bodiskoff, who had permitted himself the luxury of gazing for a few seconds at his unhappy victim, lying there bound—fettered—gagged—hurried to a crushing servitude worse than death.

With a sudden effort the young man half sprung to his feet ; but the door was immediately slammed to, and a blow on the head from the butt-end of a carbine deprived him of consciousness.

END OF VOL. I.





